

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



BIRD

August 6, 2005

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Confirmation Of Top Pentagon Official Gets Mired In Base-Closure

CQ Today

John M. Donnelly

August 5, 2005

[The last BRAC? Panel chairman says he doesn't foresee another round for at least 10 years](#)

President Bush is unlikely to appoint Gordon England to the Pentagon's No. 2 position during the August recess, despite a hold placed on the nomination by Sen. Olympia J. Snowe, R-Maine, according to knowledgeable military officials.

Local News Articles

[Letter May Affect Where Jets Land \(Norfolk, VA\)](#)

The primary reason: In a time of war and with huge changes coming in how the military is organized and equipped, Bush and Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld need leadership in place through the remainder of Bush's term. A recess appointment would last only as long as the current Congress, or until January 2007.

[BRAC Panel Sets Galena Hearing \(Fairbanks, AK\)](#)

[Navy Role In Housing Liability Is Questioned \(New London, CT\)](#)

England was nominated to be deputy Defense secretary in April. He currently serves simultaneously as acting deputy Defense secretary and secretary of the Navy.

[Reno Air Guard anxiously awaits BRAC decision on C-130s \(Fallon, NV\)](#)

Opinions/Editorials

England may do the No. 2 job indefinitely in an acting capacity because he already has been confirmed by Congress as Navy secretary. The Pentagon, however, would prefer that he be confirmed this fall, said the officials, who requested anonymity.

"It is important for the secretary to put the administration in a position to have leadership positions . . . filled to the end of the president's term," a senior defense official said.

The president already has made August recess appointments of John R. Bolton, installed as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, and Peter Cyril Wyche Flory, as assistant secretary of Defense for international security policy. Armed Services Committee Chairman John W. Warner, R-Va., publicly urged the president on Aug. 1 to make a recess appointment of England.

England was nominated to replace Paul D. Wolfowitz as Rumsfeld's top deputy. Wolfowitz is now president of the World Bank.

Snowe confirmed Aug. 5 that she blocked England's nomination from going to the floor. In a statement, she cited several concerns, including England's role as Navy secretary in reducing shipbuilding and signing off on a Pentagon recommendation to the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) commission to shutter Maine's Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, which she called an efficient facility.

"In the business world, an executive who closed his most efficient operation would not be an executive very long," Snowe said of England. Publicly, Armed Services senators have attributed the more-than-three-month delay in confirming England to concerns about his pension from former employer General Dynamics. The committee requires senior Defense nominees to buy insurance policies locking in the value of contractor pensions to protect against potential conflicts of interest. But the company that had insured these pensions stopped selling such policies, and no alternative has been found.

After months of trying to solve the conundrum, the panel granted England an exception on July 29 and sent his nomination to the floor, where Snowe's hold is now blocking further action.

While the surety issue has been a major reason for the delay, base-closure politics always have loomed as a second stumbling block, though it was not known outside a small circle in the Senate.

In May, as soon as the Pentagon sent the BRAC commission its list of proposed changes to U.S. military bases, including 33 major closures, more than one senator signaled to colleagues that they might put a hold on England's nomination, a Senate aide said. But only Snowe appears to have executed the threat.

One Pentagon official said Snowe's hold "came out of the blue," and "the surety issue masked the BRAC issue."

In September, the administration will try to address the base-closure concerns of Snowe and possibly others in an attempt to secure England's confirmation, the official said.

The commission must send its amended version of the Pentagon's base list to the president by Sept. 8.

Warner: BRAC Amendments Delayed Authorization Vote

Congress Daily
Megan Scully
August 5, 2005

Senate Armed Services Chairman Warner says efforts to use the FY06 defense authorization bill to thwart the base-closure process were the primary reason he could not move the legislation before the August recess. The \$441.6 billion bill was introduced on the Senate floor more than a week before recess but was shelved days later after Majority Leader Frist's unsuccessful attempts to invoke cloture. Had Frist succeeded, debate would have been limited to germane amendments, preventing senators from inserting language on base closures. During a hearing

Thursday, Warner told the independent Base Closure and Realignment Commission that he has several amendments on file that would halt or otherwise change the base-closure process, and expects more at the end of the August recess. He added that he hopes the chamber can "steadfastly move ahead with our bill" with no changes to the law.

Warner, a longtime BRAC champion who helped write and revise base-closure law, continued to defend the process, saying it is "essential to the country that this BRAC process be completed."

But he joined other lawmakers from Virginia in defending the Master Jet Base at Oceana Naval Air Station, a last-minute addition to the list of military installations under consideration for closure. Warner, along with Sen. George Allen, R-Va., and Democratic Gov. Mark Warner, said there is no alternative location on the East Coast for the jet base, which provides 10,000 civilian and military jobs. Commissioners voted last month to add Oceana to Defense Secretary Rumsfeld's list of recommended base closures because of concerns that development in the Virginia Beach area was encroaching on the base and impeding flight-training missions.

Adm. Michael Mullen, chief of naval operations, acknowledged that training at Oceana is "not ideal," but said the Navy does not have the resources to open another jet base by 2011, as required if Oceana is closed. "I fully support" the Defense Department's desire to have an East Coast major jet base, Mullen told the commission. "That base certainly for the foreseeable future is NAS Oceana." Within several days, the commission plans to send staffers to Florida's Cecil Field, the Navy's only other East Coast master jet base until it was closed in 1999. Several commissioners have expressed interest in studying whether reopening the former base, now a general aviation airport, could be an option if Oceana is closed.

BRAC to hear Air Guard issue

Copley News Service
August 5, 2005

The independent base closing commission has scheduled a hearing next Thursday to focus on whether Air National Guard units such as the one located in Springfield, Ill., should be included in the base closing process.

The commission seeks to ensure that the Pentagon's base closing recommendations, especially those pertaining to the Air National Guard, "do not undermine the unique mission responsibilities of the Department of Homeland Security," the invitations to the hearing stated.

The hearing was scheduled at the request of Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke of Nebraska on behalf of the Adjutants General Association of the United States, said Robert McCreary, a spokesman for the Base Closing and Realignment Commission.

In a letter to the commission last month, Lempke had argued that closing or realigning Air National Guard units would be beyond the scope of the Base Closure Act, the federal legislation which created the BRAC process. He said his group has a plan that would provide for air defense protection of all regions in the continental United States.

The governors of Illinois and Pennsylvania have filed suit against the Pentagon alleging it doesn't have the authority to move or change the composition of units without the approval of a state's governor. The Pentagon has recommended the closure or realignment of about 30 Air National Guard bases including Springfield's 183rd Fighter Wing.

Among those invited to testify at the hearing are representatives of the Adjutants General Association, the Defense Department, the Homeland Security Department, the Air Force and the National Guard Bureau.

Kulongoski says he'll sue to block Guard transfers

The governor tells the defense secretary he won't agree to losing 18 F-15s jets and 100 military members at Portland's air base
The Oregonian

Mike Francis
August 05, 2005

Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski told Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld on Tuesday that he would sue to prevent Rumsfeld's department from carrying out its plan to shift 18 F-15 jet fighters and more than 100 people from Portland to bases in other states.

"I do not consent to the deactivation, relocation or withdrawal of the 142nd Fighter Wing," Kulongoski wrote in a letter to Rumsfeld released Tuesday. "It is my present intention to file a lawsuit in Oregon's federal district court . . . to stop the proposed actions."

The governor called the warning a "prelude" to the filing of lawsuits by Oregon and other states with Air National Guard units that would be relocated under the Defense Department's 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) proposal. The proposal, announced in May, is under review by an independent commission that can add to or subtract from the Defense Department's list of proposed changes. The commission is scheduled to announce its final decision Sept. 8.

The Pentagon's proposal for the Portland Air National Guard base would shift 18 F-15s to bases in Louisiana and New Jersey, and replace them with two other F-15s. Guard officials say the base would lose 452 civilian and 112 military jobs.

The Defense Department reconfigures its military units periodically in an effort to streamline services and save money. Because each base can have a significant economic impact on the cities and states where they are located, the federal government formalized the base realignment process, which is intended to limit political arguments. Under the process, the president accepts all or none of the commission's final proposals.

Nevertheless, the current round of base realignment proposals has triggered sharp opposition in many regions. Some local officials are concerned about economic impacts; others

about regional security and other matters. But the use of the base realignment process to restructure the Air National Guard has raised a potent new area of legal argument.

Until National Guard units are activated and deployed by the federal government, they are under the command of the governors. A key, unresolved question about the base realignment proposal is whether the defense secretary has the authority to shift people and equipment that are under the command of governors, rather than federal officials.

In recent weeks, the commission has challenged the Defense Department's reasoning for the proposed changes to the Air National Guard. It has called on the department to explain why it wants to shift people from as many as 54 Air National Guard installations around the country, including Portland.

Last week, the Adjutants General Association of the United States, the organization made up of members that are the top officials of each state's military department, told the base commission that the proposals to restructure Air National Guard units "are beyond the scope of the Base Closure Act" and should be dropped from the base realignment process.

Kulongoski said Tuesday he is "very optimistic that Oregon will prevail" in its effort to keep the fighter wing at the Portland Air National Guard base.

When the BRAC commission came to Portland in June for a public hearing on the proposal, Kulongoski, Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Gordon Smith and other officials testified that the proposal to shift all but two F-15s from the Portland Air National Guard base would leave the Northwest dangerously vulnerable to terrorist threats. Wyden said in June the changes would make the region "a sacrifice zone" if terrorists attacked.

But Kulongoski said Tuesday that the question of legal authority is an important, separate issue that must be settled. He said a number of other states, like Oregon, are preparing to file suit.

Pennsylvania and Illinois have sued to block the realignment plan.

The last BRAC? Panel chairman says he doesn't foresee another round for at least 10 years

North County Times

Mark Walker

August 6, 2005

SAN DIEGO ---- This may be the last hurrah for the nationwide base closure and realignment process, according to the chairman of the panel overseeing reductions in the number of military facilities.

Rancho Santa Fe native Anthony Principi said Friday there may never be a repeat of the process known as BRAC that involves the Pentagon, the president, Congress and the Base Realignment and Closure Commission he heads.

"I don't know if we will ever see another BRAC," Principi said following a news conference conducted in the shadow of the USS Midway along the downtown San Diego waterfront. "It's a tough, tough issue. There certainly won't be one for at least the next 10 years, and possibly not at all."

Whether another round of base closures is ever conducted after the current round, the nation's fifth and first since 1995, is ultimately up to a future Congress and president.

Principi made his comments after he and three other panel commissioners toured the 83-year-old U.S. Navy Broadway Complex across the street from the historic Midway aircraft carrier, now a floating museum.

A former secretary of Veterans Affairs, Principi was tapped by President Bush earlier this year to head up an ongoing round of base closures and realignments. He was in San Diego to get a first-hand look at the Broadway Complex, home to the Navy's Southwest regional administrative offices.

Last month, the commission voted 8-1 to consider moving the complex to nearby Naval Station San Diego.

A final commission vote on that proposal will probably happen Aug. 23 or 24, Principi said. The complex is spread over eight city blocks and more than 500,000 square feet of land.

The city of San Diego and the Navy have had a nearly 20-year understanding that the complex would be made available for redevelopment. Principi and Commissioners James Hansen, Philip Coyle and James Bilbray each said it was time to make that deal come true.

Bilbray said the intention of the commission was to "prod the Navy to move this deal along."

U.S. Rep. Susan Davis, D-San Diego, also took part in the tour and said the prospective removal of the complex for redevelopment was one of the "happy things" to emerge from the base closure process.

The city and developers have long envisioned a mix of retail shops, offices and restaurants that would complement the North Embarcadero area along the waterfront.

When the commission finalizes its closure and realignment recommendations, there will be few North County and San Diego area facilities on the list.

In North County, the Pentagon proposes shifting 118 jobs from the Fallbrook Naval Weapons station to other facilities either in this state or elsewhere, and cutting 144 jobs at Camp Pendleton.

In San Diego, the military brass has proposed transferring a corpsman training program from the Balboa Naval Hospital to Texas, shutting down a defense accounting office and eliminating 460 jobs at Naval Base Coronado.

Miramar Marine Corps Air Station would get 72 new jobs, while 10 mine-sweeping ships and their 1,170 assigned personnel would be transferred from Ingleside, Texas, to San Diego.

The commission last month did press the Marine Corps brass as to why it needed to keep its downtown recruit depot adjacent to Lindbergh Field, but ultimately agreed that it should not be shut down.

Panel members, Principi in particular, were eyeing that facility in light of an ongoing search for a new regional airport or possible expansion of Lindbergh Field.

Some county residents contend that Miramar is the best site for a new airport because of its midcounty location and easy freeway access. Principi said the commission received a few letters on the issue, but that no government agency asked for Miramar's addition to the closure list.

Principi also said he did not envision Miramar as a joint military-civilian air field.

The commission must make its recommendations to the president by Sept. 8. If he agrees, the recommendations are forwarded to Congress, which then has 45 legislative days to accept or reject the list in its entirety.

If Congress rejects the proposal, the president and commission could resubmit the list or prepare a revised set of recommendations

Local News Articles

Letter May Affect Where Jets Land

Norfolk Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk, VA)

Kate Wiltrout and John Hopkins

August 6, 2005

CHESAPEAKE — Gov. Mark R. Warner's suggestion this week that the Navy build a practice jet landing field in Virginia – instead of its preferred site in North Carolina – isn't a new one for the Navy.

But Warner's recommendation to the chairman of the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission to consider Fort Pickett and southern Chesapeake may be the highest-profile

attempt to change the Navy's mind about the field.

It's also an indication that Oceana's own fate before the BRAC Commission may be tied to an outlying landing field where locally based pilots would prepare for aircraft carrier landings unencumbered by development.

That's an issue that the Navy has insisted is a separate matter entirely.

“Right now, we can't speculate on what impact on the OLF – if any – the BRAC process might have,” Ted Brown, a spokesman for the Navy's Norfolk-based Fleet Forces Command, said Friday .

Brown said the Navy did a “thorough siting study” when it began the OLF process years ago, and that Washington County, N.C., remains the preferred location.

The service wants to acquire 30,000 acres in Washington and Beaufort counties for the \$186 million field. But nature groups, residents and the counties sued, claiming that the Navy didn't properly examine the environmental impact of the project. In February, a federal judge agreed and issued a permanent injunction, which the Navy has appealed.

On July 19, the federal commission added Oceana Naval Air Station to a list of more than two dozen bases to be considered for closure. Commissioners pointed to safety issues and aviator training degraded by commercial and residential growth.

Since then, local, state, congressional and military officials have lobbied furiously on behalf of the Virginia Beach base. Warner's July 27 letter to commission chairman Anthony J. Principi reiterated that message, calling Oceana “an invaluable asset to the United States Navy, especially in its role as a Master Jet Base and training installation.”

But Warner proceeded to urge Principi to consider building an OLF at Fort Pickett in Blackstone or at the Naval Support Activity

Northwest Annex in southern Chesapeake. Both already are owned by the Defense Department.

“Clearly the Navy did not expect the lengthy legal delays that have materialized with the Washington County North Carolina site that have all but halted progress,” Warner wrote in the letter, released Thursday. “Any serious examinations in support of the Navy OLF needs must give more detailed consideration to Fort Pickett.”

Fort Pickett, an Army base used for National Guard training, covers 42,000 acres south of Richmond. It has a runway and could support aviation activities, Warner wrote.

The Navy dismissed it from consideration in 2003, citing its distance of 95 miles from Oceana and 140 miles from North Carolina’s Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Station.

At the time, the Navy said it wanted the field no more than 50 miles from the Super Hornet jets that would use it. The North Carolina site is 77 miles from Oceana.

The Navy said at the time that Pickett’s airfield didn’t meet its criteria for population density – fewer than 50 people per square mile – and that building the field there might affect wetlands and violate the Endangered Species Act.

Bob Matthias, assistant to Virginia Beach City Manager James Spore, said Friday that the city supports Warner’s recommendation. “If, at the end of the day, Washington County won’t work, there are at least two other sites in Virginia we think are strong candidates,” Matthias said.

The Naval Support Activity Northwest Annex in southern Chesapeake is a 3,600-acre facility along the city’s border with North Carolina. Warner said the annex, combined with “adjacent compatible refuge areas” and land that could be procured, make it an attractive site for consideration. The core site, he noted, was comparable in size to Oceana.

The governor’s message to the BRAC Commission came a surprise to many who live near the annex.

The largely rural area is dotted with some homes, farms and subdivisions. Dave Thomas, a member of the Southern Chesapeake Citizens for the Preservation of Rural Chesapeake, thinks the area shouldn’t be an option.

“That would be absolutely a poor idea. ... I don’t think that it could be done without destroying the rural quiet of that area,” said Thomas, adding that such a move could hurt the Great Dismal Swamp.

Steve Knapp moved into a home across from the Northwest Annex five years ago after studying the fly and flood zones for the area. His family moved to the Timberwood subdivision for the “peace and quiet,” Knapp said.

“To be honest with you, it wouldn’t bother me,” Knapp said. From his home, he can hear morning military exercises across the road, such as running and target practice. An occasional helicopter flies overhead, but the area is pretty quiet, he said.

“I’m not going to move if they come,” Knapp said. “They’re not going to force me out. They have to go somewhere.”

While Warner’s letter gives new prominence to Fort Pickett and the Chesapeake annex as potential alternatives to a Washington County landing field, the BRAC Commission may not have authority to order use of either site.

George Foresman, Warner’s top aide on base-closing issues, said a recommendation on either facility is well within the commission’s power.

Past base closing commissions occasionally have used their final reports to make recommendations or comment on issues that were beyond their authority but significant to the military’s base structure.

Derb Carter, an attorney for the Southern Environmental Law Center, which sued to stop

the Navy from building in North Carolina, said the commission's voice matters, even if it doesn't have the power to compel the Navy to pick another site.

"The BRAC Commission can certainly make recommendations that potentially carry a great deal of weight," Carter said. "One would think the Navy would pay attention."

The commission has a Sept. 8 deadline to send its report to President Bush and Congress. Principi said that meetings for discussion and final votes on its recommendations will begin Aug. 24.

BRAC Panel Sets Galena Hearing

Fairbanks Daily News-Miner (Fairbanks, AK)
Sam Bishop
August 5, 2005

WASHINGTON--The military base review commission on Monday will give Galena a chance to defend the Air Force's use of the community's runway.

The Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission will hold a hearing in Monterey, Calif., to consider the fate of Galena and other locations that it recently added to a preliminary list of military bases that could be closed or reduced.

Galena city manager Marvin Yoder said Thursday that he and Dean Westlake of the Loudon Tribal Council will attend the hearing. Leaders in the community of 700, located 275 miles west of Fairbanks, have said an Air Force withdrawal would harm their economy.

The Air Force uses Galena as a "forward operation location," where it can land jets when necessary. To keep that option open year-round, the Air Force contributes to maintenance of the state-owned runway. It also maintains several buildings through a contract with Chugach Support Services, a subsidiary of the Prince William Sound regional Native corporation Chugach Alaska. Chugach employs about 44 people in Galena.

Altogether, the Air Force estimates it spends \$10.4 million to \$11.3 million a year to maintain Galena facilities.

The BRAC Commission on July 19 unanimously decided to add Galena to the proposed closure and realignment list that the Defense Department released on May 13. That original list didn't mention Galena but did propose to gut Eielson Air Force Base near Fairbanks by removing all jets and most of about 3,000 personnel.

The commission still could remove Galena from the list, though doing so would require support from seven of the nine commissioners. Two commissioners--Phil Coyle and James Bilbray--visited Galena last week.

Monday's hearing in California will be an opportunity for Galena to formally state its case, according to commission spokesman Jim Schaefer. The commission also will take testimony on bases in California and Colorado that it added to the Defense Department's original list.

Yoder said he believes that the entire commission will attend the hearing.

As of today, according to a letter sent July 29 to senators by commission Chairman Anthony Principi, the commission will have completed all visits to sites affected by the Defense Department's original list. The commission will meet with representatives from communities near the added bases through Aug. 12.

After that, the commission needs time to study all the information and complete its recommendations, Principi said. The recommendations are due to President Bush by Sept. 8. He can accept or reject the list in its entirety. If he accepts the list, it will go to Congress, which will face the same choice.

Navy Role In Housing Liability Is Questioned

BRAC: Who's Responsible If Groton Sub Base Closes?

New London Day (New London, CT)

Robert A. Hamilton

August 5, 2005

The Navy says it can walk away from more than 2,000 units of its housing in Groton if the Naval Submarine Base is closed, and a public-private venture established last year would have to take responsibility for the homes.

But the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, which has the final say on whether Groton stays on the Pentagon closure list, is taking a hard look at whether the Navy might have a financial obligation beyond that — which could eat into any savings from closing the base.

The Navy and GMH Military Housing created a limited liability corporation last year to operate the housing, which required that GMH invest \$250 million over six years to replace or renovate the Groton units.

The \$600 million venture signed last year includes all Navy housing from New Jersey to Maine, but the Pentagon has recommended that almost all of it be abandoned. In addition to closing the Groton base, the Pentagon hit list targets the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine, and the Brunswick (Maine) Naval Air Station.

In Groton, GMH was supposed to build 122 new three- and four-bedroom townhouses on the former Nautilus III North; 119 homes for senior enlisted people and officers in Dolphin Gardens; and 44 three- and four-bedroom townhouses on the former Cherry Circle mobile home park. All the projects were slated to be finished by next spring. In addition, 427 units in Nautilus Park, Conning Towers and Polaris Park were to be renovated.

According to numerous Navy sources, GMH has already suspended much of the work in Navy housing. The Pentagon accounting to the commission said the partnership has thus far used \$180 million of the \$580 million in financing that it obtained for the project.

“We're reviewing what will occur, but I can't comment on it at this point,” GMH Senior Vice President Richard C. Taylor said Thursday.

“We're still hopeful that ultimately the sub base will be removed from the closure list.”

The commission submitted 33 questions to the Defense Department about public-private ventures (PPVs) in general, and the Groton base specifically.

“I think it's significant that the commission is aware of the PPV in the Northeast — and it's not just here, it's in Portsmouth and Brunswick — and they have asked some serious legal questions about the fiduciary responsibility of the Navy and its partner,” said John C. Markowicz, chairman of the Subbase Realignment Coalition, which is fighting to save the Groton sub base.

The Pentagon answered repeated questions from the commission about potential “unfunded liabilities” with the response that, “as a limited partner, the government's liability is limited to its initial contribution.”

The Pentagon acknowledges it has never closed a base where a PPV is operating, and its position has not been reviewed by the Navy Audit Service, the U.S. Comptroller General or the Government Accountability Office.

The Pentagon said there is no firm date established for the Navy to discontinue the utilities, fire and police services that it provides to Navy housing, only that it will continue “until such time that the parties agree to discontinue services.”

“However, every project has been executed with teams of government attorneys whose role is to ensure that the government does not assume any more liability than it bargained for,” the Pentagon response states.

The Navy turned over to the PPV all the housing units, but not the land under them, as its contribution. But GMH and other contractors that enter these kind of ventures do so on the

guarantee of a revenue stream from the housing allowances that service members receive.

In addition, critics of the proposal to close the Groton base contend the PPV would be in dire trouble because if the Navy pulls out of Groton, the housing market would collapse and it could take several years to recover.

Markowicz said after reviewing the document that he's still unsure what it means regarding Groton's ability to tax the Navy housing. Under current rules, the town can only tax the property owned by the LLC — the housing itself, not the land under the units, which would remain under Navy ownership.

Town officials have criticized that limit in the past because it means the town gets only a fraction of the tax revenue it would get from a fully private development, and would not come anywhere near covering the costs of fire and police protection and other services if the town must take it over.

“What's this mean for the Groton grand list?” Markowicz asked. “I don't know the answer, and I'm almost afraid to ask the question, because I don't know what it will mean for Groton.”

Reno Air Guard anxiously awaits BRAC decision on C-130s

Lahontan Valley News (Fallon, NV)
Burke Wasson
August 5, 2005

RENO - When it comes to diffusing emergency situations and carrying massive amounts of cargo, the state of Nevada has been able to count on the C-130 Hercules aircraft for decades.

But with the Base Realignment & Closure commission set to meet Aug. 23 to determine the fate of 180 U.S. military bases - including the Reno Air National Guard's eight C-130 planes - those duties and the livelihood of the men and women operating the aircraft are in jeopardy.

The BRAC panel recommended in May that all eight C-130s at the Reno base be relocated to Little Rock, Ark., as part of a realignment of military resources. If that recommendation is approved, the only C-130 aircraft in the West would be located at Point Mugu near Oxnard, Calif.

The C-130 has been widely recognized as the top tactical transport aircraft in the U.S. military and is used in combat for paratropping and delivering cargo into hostile areas.

In particular, the 152nd Airlift Wing of C-130s at the Reno base is the only Scathe View unit in the U.S. Air Force. Scathe View provides a live TV picture and direct communication to sources on the ground. It is used in Nevada and California to help with fire fighting efforts in forest areas and is more useful than helicopter surveillance because the C-130s can view from a higher altitude and have infrared capabilities, making it possible to see hot spots at night.

Besides reducing the capabilities of Western states to handle potential emergencies, the realignment would also force many longtime C-130 operations and maintenance technicians out of their jobs at the Reno base.

For Fernley resident and U.S. National Guard C-130 electrician Bruce Stowe, relocating the aircraft out of Reno would not only eliminate his full-time job, but also endanger his retirement benefits.

"I'm just kind of holding my breath right now," Stowe said. "My civil service retirement would take 13 more years to get.

"I've been an electrician for a long time now. I've chased this aircraft all around the world, and I won't chase it anymore for another job. I want to stay here, but I know I'd have to find work."

Mike Adams, who lives in Fallon and works as a full-time fuel technician for C-130s at the Reno Air National Guard base, said he would also refuse to move out of Nevada to continue his current job.

Adams said he would explore the option of working as an aircraft fuel technician at NAS Fallon if the opportunity arises, but would rather continue working for the Air National Guard in Reno.

"I hope (the C-130s) stay here," Adams said. "I've really enjoyed doing it. I was a kid in Virginia City and now I've visited places all over the world like overseas to the Middle East. I wouldn't have been able to see the world without the C-130s."

While the threat of the C-130s' removal from Reno has longtime employees like Adams and Stowe worried, younger Guard members are also concerned that the potential realignment could delay their goals for the future.

Traditional U.S. Air National Guard First Lt. Bill Batiz, 27, said he has made the area his home after graduating from the University of Nevada, Reno, and clearly does not want to leave. At the same time, he is trying to become an airline pilot, which requires a minimum of 1,000 hours of flight time to be eligible for hire. If the C-130s were removed the Reno Air National Guard base, Batiz said his goal would be much harder to attain.

"If the C-130s left, it would really have an impact on people fresh out of college," Batiz said. "It's so competitive anyway in the military that losing these hours would put me that much further behind. I've learned too much of a valuable skill to let it deteriorate."

Two of the nine members of the BRAC commission have visited the Reno base and the Hawthorne Army Depot, which was recommended to be closed, in the past month. Visits from BRAC commissioners Philip Coyle and James T. Hill were greeted with optimism at both bases, but nothing will be known until Sept. 8 - when the commission will hand its final recommendation list to President Bush for his approval.

In the meantime, the Reno base will hold its collective breath and hope for the best.

"I'd hate to see it happen," said U.S. Air National Guard Tech Sgt. Don Walls. "There's a lot of camaraderie and friendship here with this group working together. I'd hate to see it end."

Opinions/ Editorials

Snowe should move past her BRAC frustrations; The Maine senator is intent on blocking a key U.S. defense appointment.

Portland Press Herald (Portland, ME)
August 5, 2005

Republican Sen. Olympia Snowe has been a staunch advocate for keeping Maine's military bases active, but she now seems to be losing sight of the more important matter of the nation's interests.

Recent news reports said Snowe is blocking the nomination of former Navy Secretary Gordon England to become acting deputy of the U.S. Department of Defense. The Wall Street Journal claimed her frustration is primarily over the base closure process that is likely to close, or downsize, the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, the Brunswick Naval Air Station and a defense accounting center in Limestone.

Snowe had initially declined to comment directly on the reports from the Wall Street Journal. In a statement Thursday, however, Snowe admitted she is holding up England's nomination, but insists the issue is not just about the BRAC process. Snowe feels England has not demonstrated the kind of leadership she expects, and feels his overall vision is suspect.

Snowe's concern's about England can partly be tied to his support last year of a proposed all-or-nothing contract policy to build DD(X) destroyers. That policy is currently on hold, but could be crippling to Bath Iron Works if the Department of Defense elects to use the Ingalls shipyard in Mississippi to build the destroyers.

In the end, though, Snowe's effort to stymie England may not have any real effect. President Bush may simply install him as a recess

appointment, as he did this week in John Bolton's appointment as U.N. ambassador.

It is not a productive strategy for Snowe to use political clout as payback for a process created for its nonpartisan value, even if she was antagonized by the decisions of the Pentagon. The Base Realignment and Closure Commission reviewing the Pentagon's recommendations has to make decisions that will entail significant losses to many states, but do so with national interests as the primary gauge.

Snowe has been a laudable champion in the effort to save Maine's bases, especially in arguments supporting the national military need for the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. However, she seems unable to move past her frustration with the BRAC process and the Department of Defense - especially on the proposal to close the Portsmouth shipyard.

Snowe may very well be looking ahead to re-election, hoping that voters will regard her blockade of Gordon England as further proof of her resolve to protect Maine interests. It can also be argued, however, that such an approach is too parochial when viewed in the context of national needs.

Additional Notes