

Region's Jobs, Research at Stake in Military Base Closure Process

The future of the nation's military bases is being reviewed by the federal government, which may result in the closure of up to 25 percent of the bases across the country. All bases, including those in New England, are part of the government's 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process.

In May 2005, the Secretary of Defense will publish a list of military installations recommended for closure or realignment and present this list to the BRAC Commission.

New England's military bases make a significant contribution to the region's economy in jobs and expenditures. They have also produced advancements in technology which have led to military success.

Some of the sites around New England that may be at risk include:

In Connecticut

The South Eastern Connecticut Enterprise Region reported in a 2003 study that there are more than 7,500 military personnel stationed at the Groton Submarine Base, another 1,500 civilians employed there and more than 650 reservists training at the base. There are more than 1,000 contractors, including 450 Electric Boat employees working under Navy contract. The payroll for all employees totals more than \$452 million.

In Maine

Naval Air Station Brunswick is the only military facility capable of providing aerial surveillance of the northeast coast and maritime approaches, important for homeland security. NAS Brunswick employs 5,227 personnel including 817 civilians. It is the state's second largest employer and contributed \$243 million to the regional economy in FY 2004.

In Massachusetts

Hanscom Air Force Base and the Natick Army Soldier Systems Center (Natick Labs) together contribute more than \$3.2 billion annually to the Massachusetts economy and account for some 33,000 jobs. Hanscom is a primary center for developing

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Interview: U.S. Congressman Rob Simmons, (R-CT), Member, House Armed Services Committee

Is the military base realignment and closure issue a New England issue?

Congressman Simmons: Yes, I think it is a New England issue, a regional issue. New England is a collection of relatively small states that share history and culture. When we look at our bases we really have to look at them as a system of bases. When you look at the region's industrial base, in many cases, it connects to our military bases.

Groton, Connecticut, is the submarine capital of the world. We have been producing submarines since the Revolutionary War. We built the first submarine delivered to the Navy. We also designed and developed the first nuclear submarine. This is part of our culture and an integral part of our industrial base. That also includes the Groton site and the Naval Undersea Warfare Center in Newport, Rhode Island. We look at these facilities as interconnected.

What is our strongest case?

Congressman Simmons: You have to argue for the military value of your base. In Connecticut, for example, the navy is always going to need submarines. They are

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Congressman Rob Simmons

TIMELINE

May 16, 2005: The Secretary of Defense must publish a list of military installations recommended for closure or realignment.

July 1, 2005: The Comptroller General submits a report which is an analysis of the recommendations and process.

September 8, 2005: The BRAC Commission sends a report to the President containing its conclusions based on reviewing the Secretary's report.

September 23, 2005: President presents his approval or disapproval to the Commission and Congress, which votes to accept or reject the request.

• **Congressman Simmons**

going to need Electric Boat working on the development and production of these submarines. The sub base is an integral part of it. It provides the builders with access to the people who operate these subs. The base is also used to host other services such as Army and Navy reserve units who drill there.

What about the impact on the research and development sector. Is that an important consideration?

Congressman Simmons: It is, if the R&D has a military component. Here in Connecticut, that's the whole point of the relationships between Electric Boat and the sub base. The navy personnel interact with the Electric Boat personnel and let them know what they had trouble with or make suggestions for changes. Then the designers come in. There is constant conversation. It's a unique environment. The sub designer needs to talk to a sailor about the submarine. That's where ideas are born.

How do you think New England will fare in this round of closings?

Congressman Simmons: It's hard for me to guess at this point. We have had so many closings in the past. It seems to me that in New England we are right down to the

bone. We have bases of high military value that we cannot afford to lose.

How do you feel overall about the BRAC process?

Congressman Simmons: I have opposed the new round of base closings because the military has designated numerous bases for realignment and closure in the past that are still open and still in inventory. They haven't disposed of them because, environmentally, they are dirty. The government has to clean them up before they can dispose of them. That costs billions of dollars. I have been told it is estimated that it would cost between \$16 and \$20 billion to clean these bases up before they can be disposed of.

It's estimated that 40 percent or more of those slated for closing in the last round are still open.

At a time when money is tight – at a time when we want to get armor for our troops in combat – we are going to spend billions cleaning up military bases?

• **Jobs at Stake**

command, control, communications, computer, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance technologies. Natick Labs is responsible for researching, developing, fielding and managing food, clothing, shelters, airdrop systems and soldier support items. Both sites have contributed to technological advancements that have been credited with military successes in the Iraq War.

In New Hampshire and Maine

According to the Seacoast Shipyard Association, the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard located on the New Hampshire/Maine border, which specializes in submarine repair, employs nearly 5,000 civilians from three states with a payroll of more than \$280 million. The military

payroll last year was more than \$16 million. It is the only naval shipyard with the full spectrum of submarine maintenance experience.

The Cold Regions Research and Engineering Lab (CRREL) in New Hampshire is the U.S. Department of Defense's only laboratory that focuses on cold regions science and engineering, studying cold/winter environments and its implications for technology, tools for military activities and survival. The lab has about 250 federal employees and 40 contractors, with an annual federal payroll of \$31 million.

In Rhode Island

The Naval Undersea Warfare Center (NUWC), considered the Navy's primary undersea research laboratory, and Naval War College site on Aquidneck Island, Rhode Island, represent more than 7,300 jobs and an annual payroll of more than \$436 million.

According to a 2003 study commissioned by the Southeastern New England Defense Industry Alliance (SENEDIA), the U.S. Department of Defense employs more than 7,600 people in Rhode Island, with an annual payroll of \$499 million.

**James T. Brett, President and CEO
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The New England Council is the nation's oldest regional business organization dedicated to promoting economic development and a high quality of life in the six-state region.

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