

EXAMINING BRAC CLOSURES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. PEARCE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. PEARCE. Mr. Speaker, I would like to address the subject of the Base Realignment and Closure process that is currently ongoing. I speak as a former Air Force pilot and a member of Congress from New Mexico. Although the base that I would like to talk about does not lie in my district, I think the overall concern that I have is that the process of establishing military value has somehow been deeply flawed, at least with respect to this one base. I would like to mention a couple of things about it.

According to the criteria set up by the BRAC Commission, encroachment was supposed to be one of the important issues that was discussed. In other words, if a town grows around a military base, it somehow loses its value because there are certain processes that are not as capable of being performed. So encroachment, that is the growing of the population around the base, is an extremely important measurement as we determine military value.

But as we look at the population, the population is listed on this chart in red. In the white areas are low population density areas. Cannon Air Force base is right here about 4 or 5 miles from the Texas border on the east side of New Mexico. As you can see, there are almost no population centers anywhere around. What this means is that Air Force fighters can take off from Cannon Air Force base without flying over densely populated areas. They can carry live munitions, live bombs, and live armament over this sparsely populated area without much risk.

Now this last week we saw the Harrier jet that actually had problems and fell into a housing area with those munitions on board, and that is the problem with encroachment. And yet when the BRAC Commission says that we should not have encroachment and that will be a high priority, we see that no encroachment has occurred here. And as we look across the rest of the country, we see deep encroachment occurring; and so one criteria appears to be completely ignored with respect to Cannon Air Force base in the eastern side of New Mexico.

Another one of the criteria that was mentioned is training space unencumbered by the overflight of airlines and commercial traffic. Now, again, if people are not aware of the White Sands Missile Range that lies in the second district of New Mexico which I do respect, that is a completely restricted air space. No airliner ever flies through that air space. And so starting back across Dallas, one can see from this chart that almost no white exists, white would be the commercial air traffic. But those flights begin to divert north toward Albuquerque, or they divert south to El

Paso and fly completely around New Mexico.

Now, Cannon Air Force Base again lies about the midpoint in New Mexico along the New Mexico-Texas border, and it benefits because those airliners have already begun to divert far before they hit the New Mexico border, and so the air space that is available for training lies in this particular area. And, again, one of the extreme criteria of the BRAC Commission appears to have been either ignored or just disregarded.

The problem of training space becomes even more important when it is considered with population density. Many times aircraft that take off from densely populated areas have to fly to areas of sparse population, and each flight in a military aircraft can run tens of thousands of dollars. It might be as much as \$50,000 an hour to operate. So each hour to convey the aircraft simply to the training zone is extremely expensive both in dollars and also in the use of the hours on the military aircraft, each aircraft having a certain limited life in terms of flight hours. So, again, one of the criteria seems to be omitted.

Another criterion that was judged to be important in evaluating which bases to keep open or closed were weather on the training days. Again, green indicates the days of cloudy weather. The white areas are generally clear skies. I can tell you, having flown in New Mexico most of my life, approximately 320 days a year are available for flight training in New Mexico, and it is significantly less. The next chart I show is simply a followup on that, and it shows precipitation. Again, one can see that the area around Cannon Air Force Base simply does not have the problem of precipitation.

Again, precipitation is two problems. It is a problem of flying in bad and inclement weather, and it is also the problem of corrosion, and we do not have the problem on or in New Mexico. Again, it is a very significant thing.

The final chart, Mr. Speaker, wraps it all up. New Mexico has the best, most accessible training space, the least encroachment, and the least overflight of commercial traffic. We are not able to understand exactly how the BRAC Commission came up with its report. And we would urge the House to take a stand to see that military value is considered as we approach the approval of the BRAC process.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EMANUEL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. EMANUEL addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

OUT OF IRAQ CAUCUS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Ms. WATERS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, I come this evening to further announce to the people of this Nation that we have formed an Out of Iraq Caucus here in the Congress of the United States of America.

There has been quite a bit of debate this weekend about the activities that took place here in Congress. There was a lot of discussion this weekend about the hearing that was held right here in the basement of the Capitol headed by the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CONYERS) in conjunction with a group that is now known as AfterDowningStreet.org. And that hearing helped to give exposure to the famous, now famous, infamous memorandum that basically some see as a smoking gun, discussing who knew what, when did they know it, and what did they plan to do.

In essence, it is easy to conclude reading that memorandum that this administration, the President of the United States of America and others, had decided that they were going into Iraq, that they were going to attack Saddam Hussein long before 9/11. So that hearing took place, and it was a very interesting one.

It was a very revealing one and over 30 Members of Congress joined in the basement in this crowded room. And I have had a lot of questions this weekend about why were we jammed into such a small room, and I had to answer truthfully and let the people who asked the question know that the Republicans are in charge. They are able to determine where we meet, if we can meet, what kind of space we will have. And they have said to us, they are going to stop allowing us to use any committee rooms. And so even though it was a very small room, it was all that we could get. But, of course, those who have the power can choose to use it responsibly or irresponsibly.

And I would say to the people of this country at this time that we will be thwarted in our efforts to get the word out, to have this kind of discussion; but we will persist, we will not give up.

Further, aside from that hearing, we did form the Out of Iraq Caucus. Over 60 Members have now signed up. And I am being asked by journalists and TV personalities, what happened? Why are you having this discussion and this debate that is occurring at this time?

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I must answer those questions by saying, first of all, we have Members of Congress who were elected by their constituents on peace, justice and equality issue. We have Members of Congress who have long histories fighting and agitating for peace. Whether you talk about the Vietnam War or the work that many of us did to end apartheid in South Africa or the work that we are doing now to try to bring attention to genocide in Sudan, this is who we are. This is what we do.

Philosophically, we cannot sit here and allow this war to continue with no