



BRAC 2005 Begins

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Friday the Defense Department released recommendations for base closures as part of this round of Base Closure and Realignment, or BRAC. The recommendations go to an independent, though not completely apolitical, commission for review. The commission can make changes to the list and then send it to the President. The President has one chance to request additional changes from the committee, which the committee can accept or reject. Then the President can accept or reject the entire list. He cannot change the list. If approved by the President, the congress has a brief time period during which they can vote the list down in its entirety, or else it becomes law. Never in the prior rounds of BRAC has either the President or congress prevented a base closure.

During this round the military services have smartly used the BRAC process to consolidate many core operations and bases. The big loser in this year's BRAC is the northeast, especially Connecticut and Maine. The submarine base in New London is scheduled to close along with the Portsmouth shipyard. By contrast the south is the biggest winner, especially Georgia. King's Bay will receive most of the submarines leaving Connecticut, and Georgia's large army bases are scheduled to enjoy gains in personnel transferred from other bases. Over half of the projected losses in personnel are from base closures overseas.

What stands out about this BRAC round is the large amount of churn. While the net numbers are significant, they obscure the fact that there is a large amount of realignment giving rise to both gains and losses. On net, Florida came out very well in this round, gaining 2,757 total positions. Of these there is a net gain of 3,798 military positions offsetting a loss of 1,000 civilian jobs. Eglin Air Force Base, along with Naval Air Station Jacksonville, are the big gainers. Jacksonville will also benefit from the buildup of the sub fleet in King's Bay. Pensacola will lose 1,579 slots at its naval air station. Closer to home, Orlando's Defense Finance and Accounting Service will close, with a loss of 209 jobs. Patrick Air

Force Base loses a net of 195 jobs in its realignment, which is far better than was feared. So on net Florida did well.

Finally it is important to note that losing a base is not necessarily bad for the economy. The redevelopment of the old Orlando Naval Training Center is instructive. The old base certainly contributed to the area's economy. But the training base produced relatively modest benefits since it required only modest local inputs and had few officers. By contrast, its redevelopment into Baldwin Park has made a major net contribution to Central Florida's economy.

This is Hank Fishkind for 90.7 FM, WMFE News.

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