

Congressman Larson Continues to Push for BRAC Delay

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Congressman John B. Larson today pressed again to delay to the BRAC process during consideration of the FY06 Military Quality of Life Appropriations Bill (H.R. 2528).

Larson backed an effort by Rep. Stephanie Tubbs Jones (D-OH) to prohibit funding being spent to implement the recent BRAC recommendations until the Pentagon releases all the facility-specific information they used to make their closure and recommendations. After nearly two weeks, the Pentagon has yet to release this critical data to Congress or the communities affected. Larson would have voted for the measure to freeze BRAC expenditures; however, Tubbs Jones withdrew her amendment when it became clear that it would be ruled out of order.

"The Groton Sub Base community and the airmen of the 103rd Fighter Wing deserve a thorough and extensive review of the Pentagon's recommendations," Larson said. "This cannot happen until the Pentagon levels with us and countless other communities anxiously waiting to understand their decisions."

Larson also supported an amendment raised by Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) calling for the federal government to provide \$351 million to complete cleanup of unexploded munitions and environmental toxins on bases closed or realigned during prior BRAC rounds. Defense Department data indicates that it will cost over \$3.6 billion to clean up sites closed in previous BRAC rounds. However, the Defense Department requested only \$378 million to clean up these sites in FY2006, even while a new round of closures is scheduled to begin this fall.

Dating back to the first Base Realignment and Closures round in 1988, communities have been left with land unfit for redevelopment because the federal government has failed to live up to its responsibilities, Larson said. Before the next round of closings is begun, the federal government must address this inventory of unsafe, unusable land. The government's failure to remediate the sites it shuttered has denied communities full economic recovery.

Below are Larson's remarks during consideration of the Blumenauer amendment:

"Mr. Speaker, I would like to rise and associate myself with the remarks of the distinguished gentleman from Oregon and strongly support his amendment. Let me also add and thank the very thoughtful colloquy that was conducted by Mr. Farr to the distinguished chairman from New York and clearly his involvement and assistance is much needed and greatly appreciated."

But as a statement I dare say, for the Northeast as an entire region that has been targeted, when you look at statistically what is going on here in the 17 communities, as the gentleman noted, that are in dire shape. When you look at the length of time as we project out, you now understand why communities have such enormous apprehension about this. Or, as Finley Peter Dunne would say, "Trust everyone, but cut the cards."

In the case of the BRAC hearings we feel that we need a new deal. I further would just say to the distinguished chair and, I again applaud him personally for his efforts, that while there will be more money available for cleanup from the sale of the el Toro Marine Air Station, the amount needed is over \$3.6 billion. Even with these new funds we are less than one-third of the way there in terms of the funding.

One-third of the way there and we are adding on all these new communities and in looking at what the BRAC findings initially have projected -- especially looking at the state of Connecticut in terms of the cleanup -- how drastically underestimated they have been in those areas as well.

So these are very disturbing and that is why, again, I thank the gentleman from Oregon for raising this very important and thoughtful amendment -- a commonsense approach that before we proceed to a fifth round, that we make sure that we address these very important issues that impact all of our communities. If we are going to have trust in this process, as the gentleman has appropriately pointed out, then Congress cannot abrogate its responsibility. It has to assume that responsibility and assure these communities that are going to be impacted if we are to proceed in a strategic and very important commonsense approach to this issue.

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