

LARSON VOTES TO HALT BASE CLOSINGS

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WASHINGTON, D.C.-Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) voted Thursday for a joint resolution rejecting the 2005 round of base closures and realignments, saying that "this is the wrong process at the wrong time for our nation." The resolution was defeated 85 to 324.

Larson has maintained since 2002, when plans for a 2005 round were announced, that major changes in the nation's military infrastructure should not be undertaken during an extended period of war for an all-volunteer military that has repeatedly fallen short of its recruitment goals. Since then, Larson has consistently voted to repeal or delay further restructuring. He also has criticized the restructuring as backward, occurring before the completion of the Quadrennial Defense Review that assesses national threats and the force structure needed to meet them for the next two decades.

While Larson said he was proud that Connecticut's delegation succeeded in saving Sub Base New London from the list, Larson also objected to final recommendations that fell disproportionately on Air Force National Guards excluded from the Department of Defense's assessments.

The BRAC Commission upheld the removal of the Connecticut's Air Force National Guard's A-10 flying mission. Larson joined Connecticut Governor Rell, Attorney General Blumenthal and Senators Dodd and Lieberman in filing suit to prevent the removal of the 103rd Fighter Wing. The Second Circuit Court of Appeals vacated a federal court restraining order against Bradley's inclusion in the final recommendations that went to President George W. Bush on Sept. 8. However, the appeals court upheld the right to sue if the transfer of the planes went through. Congress has 45 days to approve or reject the recommendations.

Larson released the following statement:

"Rather than conducting an inclusive process as in the case of the Army National Guard recommendations - the Pentagon chose to craft their Air Force proposal by shutting out the very people that both the law and common sense dictate need to be included in changes to state Guard units.

As a result the final Air Force recommendations disproportionately impact the Air National Guard, with 37 of the final 42 Air Force recommendations making changes to Air Guard units in states across the nation. Governors and Adjutants General widely opposed this plan, citing the impact on recruiting and retention of Guard members, lack of consultation, and reduced availability of personnel for vital state emergency response and homeland security functions. Although the Commission ultimately approved a scaled down version of the Pentagon's Air National Guard plan crafted in the final days of their work, the final BRAC report states that the lack of coordination between the Pentagon, Governors and Adjutants General unnecessarily cost the Commission additional time and resources and damaged the previously exemplary relationship between the Air National Guard and the Air Force.

This misguided recommendation hits home in my district and state, where the 103rd Fighter Wing at Bradley Air National Guard base is slated to lose their A-10 Warthogs leaving Connecticut as the only state in the nation without an air national guard flying mission. In presenting our case to the Commission, our message was simple: the Pentagon not only used flawed data that did not take into account many of the unique capabilities of Bradley, but failed to consult our Governor in major changes to our state's militia. While Adjutant General Thaddeus Martin, the staff of the 103rd and the state delegation made a strong case for Bradley, the base was unfortunately included in the final realignment plan. The men and women of the Flying Yankees and indeed all the members of the Air National Guard, deserve better than an ad-hoc transformation plan that has the potential to seriously impact the future of these citizen soldiers and their mission.

We are forced to take legal action because the law is simple and clear: the Bradley A-10s cannot be removed without the consent of our Governor. Regardless of the result of today's vote, Connecticut has the law on its side and I am confident that we will secure the future of the Flying Yankees.

One of our most important duties is to provide for the defense of our nation. We should not be closing and realigning our bases at a time when our nation is engaged in the Middle East and faces unprecedented threats from abroad. Rejecting BRAC 2005 is simply the right thing to do for our men and women in uniform the security of our nation, and for the future of our Air National Guard.

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