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# Shut bases could get nuclear waste

The Boston Globe

## A \$15.5m funding plan allows for reprocessing

By Susan Milligan, Globe Staff | May 28, 2005

WASHINGTON -- Closed military bases could become repositories for nuclear waste under a little-noticed section of a spending bill that was passed by the House this week, exacerbating the fears of local lawmakers who are fighting the scheduled closure of four of New England's biggest bases.

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The energy and water bill from the House Appropriations Committee includes \$15.5 million for reprocessing of nuclear waste from power plants and construction of an interim nuclear waste dump. The legislation does not specify where that dump would be. But the Appropriations Committee report, which explains the bill, suggests that mothballed military bases be considered as potential sites for the waste.

Lawmakers said the idea adds to the pain of a region that faces the loss of 14,500 jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars if the recommendations by the Base Realignment and Closure

Commission are adopted.

Maine lawmakers met yesterday with the chairman of the BRAC to plead for Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine, which is on the closure list, and the Brunswick Naval Air Station which is to be "realigned," or shrunk.

"I'm very, very concerned about this. Our citizens would be very upset," Maine Governor John Baldacci said when he was shown the committee report language. He said he had been unaware of the proposal, and "to think that someone could put nuclear waste there. . .is outrageous."

Also slated for closure are Otis Air National Guard Base on Cape Cod and the New London Naval Submarine Base in Groton, Conn. All told, the closures in New England would represent half of the 29,000 job losses nationwide under the closure plan.

Meanwhile, under fire from Congress, the Defense Department promised yesterday to give lawmakers access by next Tuesday to detailed material backing up its recommendations to shut down about 180 military installations across the country. Parts of the report are classified, so the Pentagon said legislators and staff with security clearances must review that data at a secure location in northern Virginia.

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The announcement comes in the wake of increasing demands from lawmakers and state and local officials for the release of what will be an unprecedented amount of data in defense of the base closing plan. Lawmakers hope to use the information to persuade the independent commission reviewing the base closings to remove certain installations from the hit list.

Representative Edward J. Markey, Democrat of Malden, said the proposal to put nuclear waste on closed bases was an insult to local communities that face a hardship from the job losses attached to the closings. "Congratulations -- you may have lost your military facility, but you may be the winner of nuclear waste coming to your community," Markey said.

He sought to kill the idea of temporary nuclear waste dumps by defunding it in the energy and water bill, but his amendment was defeated, 312 to 110.

The report language emphasizes the need to find interim sites for nuclear waste while the nation awaits the opening of a permanent nuclear waste repository. Yucca Mountain, in the Nevada desert, has been selected for permanent commercial nuclear waste disposal, but administrative and court actions have delayed the opening until at least 2012.

Sites such as shut military bases and other federally owned lands would be more cost-effective as temporary nuclear waste sites than privately owned parcels since they are federally owned and have security systems in place, the report said. It did not recommend any bases by name or location, or indicate a preference between bases that have been closed and those facing closure.

Other federal locations would also be considered, said Sara Perkins, a spokeswoman for Representative David Hobson, the Ohio Republican who filed the Appropriations Committee report. They include the Savannah River site in South Carolina and the site in Hanford, Wash. Both were used for nuclear weapons development by the federal government. Currently, the two sites do not accept commercial nuclear waste, a Department of Energy official said.

As for the shuttered military sites, "some communities may look at that as something they may be able to compete for because of the jobs it could bring," Perkins said.

Mike Waldron, a Department of Energy spokesman, said the agency "is reviewing the proposal."

"However, we believe that a permanent geological repository is the right policy for America," he said, underscoring the administration's determination to open Yucca Mountain as a permanent site.

The issue fuels concern among environmentalists about the health and safety of residents near closed bases. President Bush last month suggested putting oil refineries on shuttered bases. The energy bill approved by the House last month would limit the state and local role in issuing permits for refineries -- a provision opposed by local officials.

Environmental activists are also concerned about language in the Department of Defense authorization legislation making its way through Congress. The DOD is required by law to clean up closed military sites, many of which have accumulated toxins from handling radioactive material and lead paint among other substances, said Phil Clapp, president of the National Environmental Trust.

The Senate version of the Defense Department's bill says the fund for realignment and closures should be the "sole source" of funds to clean up the sites. Such language could be interpreted to mean that the Pentagon isn't responsible for cleanup once the BRAC funds are exhausted, or the fund is retired, Clapp said.

"There is literally no way of calculating how many billions -- or even up to a trillion

dollars -- how much liability would be dumped on state and local governments for clean-up," Clapp said. "It's saying, 'once it's [depleted], that's your problem'," he said.

The House language states that the Defense Department cannot shirk its obligation to clean up contaminated former military sites. A Democratic House energy staff member said a revised House version made the language explicit once lawmakers realized it might free the Pentagon from responsibility to clean up the sites.

A BRAC spokesman did not return calls seeking comment.

Baldacci joined other Maine lawmakers yesterday in a group appeal to Anthony Principi, chairman of the BRAC Commission. The lawmakers said that the Department of Defense has not produced the data, and that the documentation is required under law to support the closure decisions.

"This is typical stonewalling and obfuscation by the Department of Defense on base closings," Senator Olympia J. Snowe, Republican of Maine, said after the meetings. Senator Susan M. Collins, Republican of Maine, said Principi "seemed alarmed at some of the information we gave him" about the security implications of closing the Maine facilities.

*Material from the Associated Press was used in this report.*

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