



Base Realignment and Closure

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Good news for Fort Sam

BRAC proposal increases workforce, brings new missions

By Shadi May and Elaine Wilson
FSH Public Information Office

It was good news for San Antonio's sole Army post. The Department of Defense's base realignment and closure proposal, announced Friday by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, includes a recommended 4,300-person increase to Fort Sam Houston's workforce and a significant expansion of post missions.

"Today's recommendations will allow Fort Sam Houston to become DoD's premier medical training base," said Col. Richard Agee, Army Medical Department Center and School chief staff, during an announcement of the BRAC decision Friday. "We are pretty confident Fort Sam Houston will be here for a long time."

In total, Fort Sam Houston will welcome 2,620 military, 1,613 civilians and 4,995 students. Fort Sam Houston is currently home to more than 26,000 military and civilians, along with 36,000 incoming and outgoing students throughout the year.

"Fort Sam Houston will remain and continue to grow," said Texas Congressman Lamar Smith, during a press conference on post shortly after the BRAC list was released. "The increase will guarantee the future of the post."

The new jobs will be a mix of inter-county transfers and a creation of new positions, the congressman said, which will be needed to support the proposed incoming activities.

A key incoming activity involves a transfer of medical functions from Wilford Hall Medical Center at Lackland Air Force Base to Brooke Army Medical Center.

"The inpatient workload from Wilford Hall will come to BAMC," Agee said. "That will be a huge impact on BAMC, which can handle the additional work."

The additional capacity would establish BAMC as DoD's major medical presence in the area, post leaders said.

Another significant impact would be the assumption of the enlisted basic and specialty medical training from the Air Force and Navy, which would transform Fort Sam Houston into the only joint enlisted specialty training environment in DoD.

Other proposed incoming activities for Fort Sam Houston include:

- Transfer of combat casualty care research and dental research from the Naval Medical Research Center at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, the Naval Training Station at Great Lakes, Ill., and Brooks City Base, Texas. The relocations will create a tri-service dental and combat casualty care science and technology center at Fort Sam Houston.
- Transfer of enlisted histology technician training from the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology at Walter Reed Army Medical Center to Fort Sam Houston.
- Transfer of the Installation Management Agency Northwest Region Office and the Network Enterprise Technology Command Northwest Region Office from Rock Island, Ill. IMA Northwestern and Southwestern Region Offices will consolidate into a single Western Region and NETCOM Northwestern and Southwestern Region Offices into a single Western Region at Fort Sam Houston.

To fund the changing missions, Fort Sam Houston will have access to \$800 million for construction, earmarked for the installation as well as for the expansion of nearby Camp Bullis.

“This is all one more chapter in the Army’s transformation,” said Agee. “Fort Sam Houston will be a very busy place very quickly once the changes start taking effect.”

Smith said the good news wasn’t limited to Fort Sam Houston; Texas as a whole fared well.

“We had 6,000 net gains and half of that number is in San Antonio,” he said. “So, military city will continue to be military city. “I’m particularly grateful that military in my district came out so well - no net losses at Fort Sam Houston. “

“Fort Sam Houston fared well because it has it all – it’s unique and recognized throughout the military. That, plus a supportive community, adds up to a good gain,” he said.

While encouraging, the BRAC recommendations are still in the preliminary stages. The proposal will now be submitted to a BRAC commission, which will forward their recommendations to President Bush by Sept. 8. The President has until Sept. 23 to approve or disapprove the recommendations in their entirety. He will then submit final recommendations to Congress Nov. 7. The plan becomes final within 45 legislative days unless Congress passes a joint resolution to block the package.

If adopted, the recommendations would give the DoD a net savings of almost \$50 billion over 20 years, officials said. Annual savings are pegged at \$5.5 billion a year after that.

Although the estimated BRAC timeline is about six years, Smith guesses, if approved, local changes would be quicker. “With Wilford Hall already here in the same county, and some of the jobs being local gain, I’m thinking we’re not going to have to wait six years. It will probably be more like two to three.”

The Department of Defense has set up a Web site for more information about BRAC and related subjects to include employment concerns and questions at www.dod.mil/brac.