

Remarks of Chairman Wittman
Hearing of the Committee on Armed Services
Readiness Subcommittee
“Whether BRAC is appropriate at this time”
March 14, 2013

Welcome to this afternoon's hearing. I'd like to thank our panel of experts for being here today to address "whether BRAC is appropriate at this time".

After reading your opening statements, I understand one of the principal reasons why the Department requested a BRAC round last year was because of the imbalance between infrastructure and future force structure. This imbalance was caused by reduced force structure level imposed by the Budget Control Act. Unfortunately, this is a very good example of a poor plan. Whenever budget drives strategy, poor decisions result which in this case includes a reduced force structure.

I categorically reject this notion that presumes to balance the federal budget on the backs of our servicemembers. Having budget decisions driving strategy is both immoral and only increases the likelihood of servicemen and women not returning from future combat. I believe that the Department of Defense needs a robust military capacity and that any diminution of this capacity should be staunchly opposed.

Furthermore, this assertion that a reduction of 100,000 servicemembers is a principal reason to have a BRAC round today is short sighted. I compared the BRAC 2005 force structure numbers with the 2017 future force structure proposed by the Department. While it is true that we will have reduced the active force structure by 130,000 servicemembers, this is almost completely offset by the increase in civilian personnel of 120,000 over the same period. Where is the excess infrastructure? I have yet to see any empirical evidence that would provide even the slightest degree of support for another round of BRAC.

As to the BRAC process itself, BRAC 2005 was an absolute failure. Cost estimates to implement BRAC 2005 recommendations have increased from \$21 billion to \$35 billion (66 percent) compared to the Commission's reported estimates. GAO determined that BRAC 2005 payback would not occur for 13 years (until 2018). Even more efficient BRAC initiatives of the 1990s did not payback until a few years after the BRAC implementation was finalized. At a time when there is significant variability in the budget and the ensuing force structure, would a BRAC round be effective in providing rapid savings? Unfortunately, history has emphatically told us NO.

I believe that the Department should pursue a multi prong strategy that fully utilizes the available capacity. Leveraging the private sector to support the military and use excess infrastructure provides a valuable revenue stream in a time of diminishing resources. Furthermore, the Army and the Marine Corps heavily relied on temporary facilities to support the Grow the Force initiatives. I think that we need to reduce this temporary infrastructure first before we move forward with eliminating entire bases and other permanent infrastructure.

While I look forward to the discussion today with our esteemed group of witnesses to see if there is a compelling argument to change my position, I continue to have significant reservations with authorizing another BRAC round because of critical flaws in terms of both the process and the underlying assumptions. I believe that aggressively moving forward with a BRAC round could significantly harm our military and their ability to project power.

Joining us today are:
Mr John Conger, Acting Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Installations and Environment;
Honorable Katherine Hammack, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Installations, Energy and Environment;
Mr Roger Natsuhara, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Energy, Installations and Environment; and
Mrs Kathleen Ferguson, Acting Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Installations, Environment and Logistics

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you all very much for being here. I appreciated your thoughtful statements and your insights into this complex topic.

While I understand that we are in challenging budget times, it is a matter of record that this administration has been unable to deliver a timely budget request for the fourth consecutive year. Considering this late submission, I understand that our witnesses will not be able to comment on the record as to whether the administration will support a request for another round of BRAC in the fiscal year 2014 budget request. However, the administration did request two additional rounds of BRAC in last year's budget request and former Secretary of Defense Panetta indicated his support for additional infrastructure consolidations earlier this year. I expect our witnesses to be able to discuss their thoughts as to the applicability of BRAC with the current force structure and overseas force posture.

With that said, I'd like to extend the opportunity to my distinguished Ranking Member for any opening remarks she may wish to make. Mrs. Bordallo?