

Navy Must Seriously Consider Alternative OLF Sites, Congressman Says

Washington, D.C. - Rep. David Price (NC-04) was once again able to put Congress on the side of the many North Carolinians concerned about the Navy's plan to locate its Outlying Landing Field (OLF) in Washington County. The North Carolina Democrat included a provision in the military's construction budget that requires the Navy to demonstrate to Congress that it is considering alternative OLF sites in good faith and in accordance with court orders.

The provision that Price inserted further affirms Congress's expectation that the Navy comply with recent court orders that require it to reexamine its OLF decision. The bill also requires the Navy to provide Congress with a written report showing that it has conducted a comprehensive analysis of environmental impact on the area and that it has considered a number of alternative OLF sites in cooperation with the State of North Carolina. The House Appropriations Committee passed the spending bill today, and it is expected to be approved by the entire House next week.

"North Carolina is the most military-friendly state in the union, and we have made every effort to work with the Navy in finding a suitable site," Price said. "The Navy owes it to North Carolinians to work in good faith and to fully reassess their past positions."

In addition to local residents who fear an encroachment into their way of life by the constant stream of fighter jets taking off and landing at the OLF, there are concerns about environmental repercussions and flight safety due to the large populations of swans and geese that flock to nearby Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge in the winter. The Refuge is also a favorite location for hunting, fishing, and recreation. A decision by the 4th District Court of Appeals in 2005 found that the Navy's initial study of the environmental impact of the OLF in Washington County was inadequate and required the Navy to conduct a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS). The same court order directed the Navy to seriously reconsider alternative sites for the OLF and warned that the Navy's reassessment should "not simply serve to ratify forgone conclusions" about the location of the OLF.

Price noted, however, that recent events suggest the Navy is not interested in taking its legal obligations seriously. The Navy has moved ahead with plans to purchase land in Washington County, and when pressed by Price during a recent congressional hearing, Admiral Michael

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Mullen, Chief of Naval Operations, suggested that the Navy was fully committed to locating the OLF at the site of its choosing, in Washington County. Mullen also said that the Navy would not consider additional alternative locations within North Carolina that Gov. Mike Easley has suggested.

"I am grateful that my colleagues on the Appropriations Committee recognized the importance of holding the Navy to account on its end of the bargain," Price said. "I fully expect the Navy to complete its impact statement and report to our committee promptly, completely, and in good faith."

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