

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Representative David Price (NC) was less than satisfied with the U.S. Navy's position on an Outlying Landing Field in Washington County, NC. In a congressional hearing this week, Price asked Admiral Michael Mullen, Chief of Naval Operations, if alternative locations with fewer environmental and safety concerns had been seriously considered for a planned jet landing field. The field would support operations at Oceana Naval Air Station, Virginia and Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Station, North Carolina.

Despite a federal court order and language in the 2006 Military Construction Appropriations bill directing a serious look at alternative sites, the Navy's senior admiral admitted that the focus was on making their preferred site work rather than considering other possibilities.

"The federal appeals court's decision last year specifically warned that the Navy's environmental reassessment should 'not simply serve to ratify foregone conclusions,'" said Price after the hearing. "However, it appears they have chosen to ignore the court and proceed without full consideration of alternatives to their hand-picked site, despite serious concerns about its viability."

A 2005 federal court decision ordered the Navy to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act, which requires the consideration of alternatives when a proposed government action would have significant environmental impact. Concerns about environmental impact and flight safety have been raised because large populations of swans and geese winter at nearby Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge.

Last year, the Fourth Court of Federal Appeals found that the Navy had taken inappropriate shortcuts in completing an Environmental Impact Statement, and specifically ordered the Navy to "proceed with a hard look and honest assessment of the environmental impacts" of the proposed site."

Admiral Mullen also told the Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs Subcommittee yesterday that the Navy will not consider alternative sites proposed more recently by the governor of North Carolina and former governor of Virginia, and cast doubt on whether any alternatives to a controversial location in Washington County will be considered for the facility.

"That frankly puzzles me," Price said. "Both governors are fully cognizant of the need for this facility and their recommendations were made with due consideration and in good faith."

The Navy seems to be flaunting the intent of Congress, the instructions of the Court, and the public interest of the people of North Carolina. We have signaled from the beginning that we are willing to work with them on this, but they are not upholding their side of the bargain."

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