

**North Carolina** - By BILL SANDIFER

Staff Writer

Fourth District U.S. Rep. David Price, a Democrat from Chapel Hill, has entered the outlying landing field fray, calling on the Navy to go "back to the drawing board."

According to a news release issued late Wednesday by 1st District Rep. G.K. Butterfield's office, Price's comments were made during a "sharp exchange" at an afternoon House Appropriations subcommittee hearing.

Price couched his remarks in the context of a recent federal ruling by Eastern District Judge Terrence Boyle that has halted Navy OLF work until the military branch either wins on appeal or redoes much of its environmental study, which Boyle pronounced flawed and incomplete in his court ruling on Feb. 18.

"There is a strong consensus at the state level," said Price, "that the Navy's site is problematic, and that feeling has been affirmed by Judge Boyle's decision. But I also believe that there is a strong consensus that an alternative can be found, and the state is ready to help find another site. Is the Navy exploring one?"

Navy officials, according to the release, replied the Navy was not "extensively" considering alternatives, would appeal Boyle's ruling and were "planning for success" in their appeal.

Price reportedly expressed disappointment the Navy was going ahead with the appeal, despite the gathering weight of public opinion against the project.

"This is not just a legal question about process," said Price. "It is about the legitimate concerns

that have been raised by stakeholders. In light of the judge's ruling, this issue is absolutely ripe for reconsideration."

The release says Butterfield praised Price for calling on the Navy to work with North Carolina in finding a solution.

"The Navy needs to understand that the opposition is centered on the site, not on the need for an OLF," said Butterfield. "We believe that if everyone could get behind another site we could quickly move this forward together."

In his new role as a member of the House Armed Services Committee, Butterfield, on Wednesday, spoke with Adm. William J. Fallon, former Atlantic Fleet Forces commander and a key figure in the OLF process. Butterfield asked Fallon, now head of the Pacific Command, about the Navy's OLF plans in the wake of the ruling. Fallon, says the release, confirmed the Navy would appeal the ruling and would consider no other sites, describing the Washington County site as the best available.

The news was not received well in Washington County.

"I am encouraged to see true statesmanship in both Congressmen Butterfield and Price," said Jennifer Alligood, North Carolinians Opposed to the OLF director. "The Navy's documents openly indicate that they filled in holes in (environmental studies) to placate the dictates of powerful politicians. And why they are so sure of winning their appeal makes me wonder what they have up their sleeves in the Virginia courts."

The appeal would be heard by the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, Va. Only one North Carolina judge sits on that bench.

"It is frightening that the military is expecting the citizenry to become increasingly more subservient to their dictates -- and refuses to consider the voice of the people for whom they work."

Roper Mayor Bunny Sanders has been a vocal opponent of the OLF, voicing fears that OLF flights will lead to a repeat of an incident in the late 1990s in which a military jet crashed just short of the downtown part of her community.

"I appreciate the fact that (Butterfield and Price) are willing to ask the Navy the hard questions about their total disregard for the concerns of North Carolinians, about the negative impact of their ill-advised decision," said Sanders. "I also hope that the governor and the North Carolina General Assembly will recognize how impotent the state looks in the national arena, as it allows Sen. (John) Warner of Virginia to impose his desire to mitigate noise in Virginia by forcing an unnecessary OLF in an area of our state that the entire leadership of the state of North Carolina claims they object to.

"If the state of North Carolina aggressively opposes the Navy decision and utilizes everything in its power to stop it, (the OLF) will not happen. My daddy used to say that power ain't power until you use it," she added.

Warner, a longtime Republican member of the U.S. Senate, is chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Despite the Navy's announced intentions to appeal, it appears no court papers have been filed yet.

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