



Pentagon Wants More Base Closures In 2017, Senators Fuss

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During a Wednesday hearing at the Senate Armed Services Readiness and Management Support sub-panel, a group of Senators vigorously opposed the Pentagon's proposed plans to close down additional bases in 2017.

This time around, the Pentagon is arguing that a new Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) round would only cost \$6 billion dollars but result in an annual savings of \$2 billion dollars, [The Hill reports](#).

The BRAC process is not popular among legislators. Republican Sen. Kelly Ayotte of New Hampshire argued that the last BRAC in 2005 actually produced higher costs than benefits, since expenses escalated up to \$35 billion, while the savings generated only amounted to \$4 billion annually. In response, the Pentagon has largely agreed, promising that this time around, the BRAC process will be more reminiscent of fast and efficient BRACs in the 1990s.

"I come with a dislike for the BRAC process to begin with, so this is going to be a case of convincing me that it's the right thing to do," Republican Sen. Mike Rounds [stated](#).

Part of the reason the Pentagon is looking to consolidate is the specter of sequestration in the background, as the currently proposed defense budget exceeds caps by \$38 billion dollars. Hearings over the last few weeks have seen calls from all branches of the military that sequestration would not only threaten military readiness in the short-term, but also the long-term.

Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham on Wednesday testified at a Senate Appropriates hearing about the Army budget, saying, [according to Breaking Defense](#), "if we want to insist on sequestration, we'd better be willing to go back home and tell people [that] every base that's open today is not going to survive."

Army Secretary John McHugh shot back that comprehensive, across-the-board cuts are only on the table in the first place because Congress refuses to consider allowing another BRAC round. If

Congress relented, McHugh argued, BRAC would result in fewer closures and less damage than if sequestration were allowed to wreak havoc. According to estimates, scaling back infrastructure by just 5 percent would result in major savings.

“I think they should be looking over the inventory of excess property that they have and selling it and privatizing it,” Steve H. Hanke, professor of applied economics at John Hopkins University and senior fellow at the Cato Institute, told The Daily Caller News Foundation. “The military doesn’t just have bases. They have a tremendous amount of inventory.

They should be privatizing on a regular basis, but they’re not usually incentivized to manage things in a rational or efficient way. Besides, even if the Department of Defense sells assets, the cash that would be received wouldn’t be earmarked for the DOD. It would simply go back to general funds. The government bureaucrats manage the publicly-owned assets. It’s really a Soviet-type setup, and it’s really not just a matter of peanuts. It’s a huge balance sheet.”

Hanke has a long history with privatization. As senior economist on the Council of Economic Advisors during the Reagan administration in the early 1980s, Hanke prompted the president to establish a Property Review Board to privatize federal lands.

“Once you add politics to the mix, particularly with congressional delegations, if you talk about shutting down a base in someone’s congressional district, they’ll be yelling and screaming,” Hanke added. “The squeaky wheel gets the oil.”