Military base closures possible across the country

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WASHINGTON D.C. (WPRI) – The Senate Armed Services committee is preparing a proposal that could impact some military bases and nearby communities right here in Rhode Island.

Sen. Jack Reed and Sen. John McCain are crafting a bill in the nation's capitol that would start another round of BRAC – Base Realignment and Closure. BRAC, last undertaken in 2005, is a process by which the military closes facilities and relocates units to other bases in order to save money.

"It will not take effect earlier than 2022," Reed said. "It would be based on analysis by the Department of Defense with congressional participation."

Defense Budget Analyst Mandy Smithberger says if the proposal was approved, the Pentagon could save upwards of $2 billion per year.

"We're talking about potentially adding more ships, more planes, and modernizing the forces," Smithberger said.

Christopher Preble, of the CATO Institute, use to be stationed at the Newport Naval Base. He says communities near military bases should not be concerned.

"You do have a number of instances where you have communities in some cases anxious to regain the property that [they] believe they can put to more productive uses," Preble said.

Experts do not believe Newport's Naval Base will be one of the one's that would be shut down if the bill passed.

"The [Newport] Navy Base is growing in importance not decreasing," Reed said. "They're irreplaceable for the Navy."

"Communities are going to be very involved in the process so I think that Rhode Islanders should watch the process moving forward but that there isn't a reason to worry," Smithberger said.

During the 2005 BRAC, Naval Station Newport actually gained the Navy's Officer Candidate School, which had previously been located in Pensacola, Florida, and the Navy Supply Corps School, which had been in Georgia.

The next step is for Sen. Reed and Sen. John McCain is to formally introduce their proposal and hold hearings on it in Congress. A date has not yet been set on when that will happen.