

## Congress looks to forego base closure process despite military push

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Congress looks to pass on a new base closure process — one which could have big implications for Wright-Patterson Air Force Base — even with military support.

In its defense budget for the 2018 fiscal year, the House shot down a proposal pushed by President Donald Trump and supported by military leaders for a new Base Realignment and Closure, or BRAC round. While its \$696 billion version, which passed Friday, is larger than the \$639 billion version proposed by Trump, it contains language that "Nothing in this Act shall be construed to authorize an additional Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) round."

That's not to say the issue is dead. The Senate has yet to take up its own version of the bill, and the two bodies must agree on a budget before Trump signs it into law. But the Senate's version has similar language.

"This is not a forceful rejection of the Administration's request for a BRAC round in 2021, but it is a rejection, nonetheless," said Michael Gessel, vice president of federal government programs for the Dayton Development Coalition. "There is similar language in the NDAA version that passed the Senate Armed Services Committee. If that is not removed on the Senate floor, it seems very unlikely we will see Congressional action this year approving a BRAC round."

An attempt to put an amendment allowing BRAC into the budget failed by a vote of 175-248 on the House floor. Locally, U.S. Rep. Warren Davidson (R-Troy), U.S. Rep. Jim Jordan (R-Urbana) and U.S. Rep. Steve Chabot (R-Cincinnati) voted for the amendment, while U.S. Rep. Mike Turner (R-Dayton) voted against.

"That puts the House firmly on record opposing a BRAC round," Gessel said.

This comes in spite of growing support from military leaders who say a base reorganization process could save \$2 billion a year. In testimony before Congress, Maj. Gen. Timothy Green, Air Force Director of Civil Engineers Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics, Engineering and Force Protection, said BRAC savings could "will leave more Department of Defense resources available ... across the board," for the Air Force to be more efficient.

It's not unusual to see disagreement over a base closure process between military and Congressional leaders — such a process could lead to jobs and economic loss if missions are moved. To CNBC, analysts likened BRAC to a " hot potato."

Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, where 27,500 people work, anchors the larger \$4.3 billion local defense industry. Officials have said the 8,100-acre base has significant infrastructure in need of updates. Wright-Patt has 590 buildings with more than 16 million square feet of space. It has roads, buildings and other infrastructure in need of critical updates, a commander recently said, prompting a scramble by local leaders to get it state and federal funds for updates.

Before the vote on BRAC, the House Armed Services Committee released a fact sheet that justified its position, citing a need for further study, expense and cost savings. This was in turn criticized by the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute.

"No one believes that the current military force structure is adequate to meet the threats we face," states the HASC paper. "In fact, senior commanders continually testify that our military is too small. Assessing our capacity based on an inadequate force structure makes no sense."

Secretary of Defense James Mattis, for his part, said in written testimony last week that BRAC was "a cornerstone of our efficiencies program."

"The Department currently has more infrastructure capacity than required for operations - and foreseeable growth scenarios won't appreciably change this," Mattis wrote. "I recognize the severity of BRAC's impact on communities and the careful consideration that members must exercise in considering it."