



Make commerce Kelly's new mission

By J. Ronald Carey

Here we go again, another BRAC attack. The 1995 Base Closure and Realignment Commission, otherwise known as BRAC, has put Kelly AFB on its list.

The city leaders, unions and assorted group representatives will meet. They will spend hundreds of hours and hundreds of thousands of dollars trying to convince the commission that it is cheaper to keep Kelly than other bases, and jobs for minorities should be protected.

There will be demonstrations, banners and T-shirts. This effort might be successful, but it is shortsighted for several reasons, including:

- Even if BRAC '95 agrees to leave Kelly open, the fight is not over. There will be other studies, commissions, blue ribbon panels and investigations in the future. It never ends. There is no victory to this kind of fight. There is, at most, a battle won. The same, or similar, battles will be repeated endlessly.

ANOTHER VIEW

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● Kelly is closing anyway. Look at the numbers over the past 25 years. Kelly's military and civilian employment has gone from 24,000 to 12,000. Ninety percent of that decline has been in civilian positions.

● Kelly's revenue source is declining. The defense budget is headed south, and even a Republican resurgence cannot change this fact: The money is not there. The secretary of defense has announced that military priorities will be on people (housing, etc.) and not equipment. Fewer

airplanes means less maintenance, reduced repair parts, fewer hangars, etc. All the elements of dollar generators for a major logistics facility are going down.

● Base closings don't have to hurt area communities. If the local people work together, they can make up for the loss. Look at some examples from recent Business Week and Fortune articles. When Chanute AFB closed in Illinois, the town lost 1,035 civilian jobs. The townspeople hustled and lured civilian organizations, bringing in 1,000 new jobs. Those jobs are in various industries not subject to the ups and downs of a single customer.

Williams AFB in Arizona lost 5,000 jobs and will get more than that back. Those bases where the recovery was not as good have been communities which did not unite for the common good.

The facts make it clear: Kelly is doomed. We have to face it.

We can muster our forces for now, but all we will get is the temporary avoidance of

what will happen gradually over the next several years, regardless.

And what a sad sight that will be. As money dries up and missions evaporate, painting is put off, roads are not resurfaced and buildings deteriorate. Let's not do that to a proud place.

Instead, let's make Kelly a center of commerce. It can be the base for the resurgence of San Antonio and this part of Texas.

We establish a business-government coalition to take over the site now. Then we get it named an enterprise zone. And then we go to market.

San Antonio will have a first-class distribution center to offer to the world. We bring back its original name, and we promote a facility which has:

- Local government with a can-do attitude.
- Great weather.
- A solid labor base.

- A long, long runway.
- Warehouse buildings.
- Access to two interstate highways.
- Proximity to Mexico.

Others have been faced with this situation. Fort Ord will have a new university. Myrtle Beach AFB is starting a theme park. Packard Bell is moving its headquarters to the Sacramento Army Depot. We can do it, too.

But we have to move on this. Perhaps you saw that Nokia will employ 2,000 people in a plant near the Alliance Airport at Fort Worth. That might have been ours. Don't let any more get away. Rather than fighting what will be a losing battle, let's decide now to keep the Kelly spirit alive. Let's just change its mission. Everyone will win.

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