Remarks of Congressman Solomon P. Ortiz
May 20, 2004
Delivered on the House Floor in opposition to an amendment relating to The Base Realignment and Closure process

Since we conceived BRAC in 1989, the United States has sent troops abroad 24 times … to nearly every continent on the planet. Our interests are everywhere danger can gather. Congress needs to see the global strategy the Administration proposes for the nation and we need to see it far in advance of the coming BRAC. Congress is Article I… we do get to make a decision of this nature.

We are at war … and there is a lot of uncertainty over the resources we need. Congress cannot fly blind, we need to evaluate our global posture situation … and we must hear the analysis on that before we allow BRAC to proceed. The war in Iraq – and the war in Afghanistan – are not the only unknowns we face. As Chairman Hunter advocated and I supported – this bill increases our troop levels by 39,000.

We are also considering major movement of troops from South Korea and Europe back to the U.S. … So, where are we going to put them? You do not close major components of your military infrastructure while you are still unsure if you need it … and world events yet to happen over the next few years will dictate that need.

The most-often heard arguments in favor of BRAC are that there is excess space we do not need, and it will save us money. I respectfully disagree with both prospects.

As for excess space … that could be a possibility in peacetime … maybe … but not now … not when the nation is at war. It's not entirely accurate to say we have excess space – does anybody know the current maintenance and repair workload? There is no excess space at the depot in my district. That will likely not change if the operations tempo continues at the present pace.

While I know we hear about cost savings associated with BRAC, I profoundly disagree with DoD estimates … mostly because they are not all-inclusive. For instance, in the GAO Report to my friend Mr. Snyder, the opening letter notes that DoD calculates net savings based on eliminating/reducing personnel and base ops… and the cancellation of mil con projects. That's it. Really? So the math doesn't include the astronomical cost to clean up the surrounding environment? The cost of clean up continually streaks upward.

I suppose if you leave out all the costs, it would appear to save money. But Congress should insist the Pentagon include all those costs if we are serious about understanding any savings in this.

Let me read from the GAO report presented to my Readiness Subcommittee 2 months ago: "BRAC rounds have generated substantial net savings … <u>for the Department</u> [DoD, emphasis added]. We have … viewed these savings estimates as imprecise for a variety of reasons, such as weaknesses in DOD's financial management systems that limit its

ability to fully account for the costs of its operations; the fact that DOD's accounting systems … are oriented to tracking expenses and disbursements, not savings; the exclusion of BRAC-related costs incurred by other agencies; and inadequate periodic updating of the savings estimates that are developed."

Know what? As a member of this Congress, I'm more interested in the savings TO THE TAXPAYER than to the Department. So while the math provided by the Pentagon certainly shows on paper what they think will be savings, that math is only as solid as ALL the information on which they base decisions.

Another consideration in this discussion is the fact that the Department of Homeland Security has not nearly grown up into what it needs to be. It is a brand new, major reorganization of all the national assets that protect our families and the country. DHS may need to use some elements of the current military infrastructure as they determine future needs.

It will be much harder to reacquire a property for the government if we dispose of it through BRAC.
When Congress designed a BRAC for 2005, we were at peace. Now we are at war, and near a BRAC that could very well dispose of military assets we will need again – either for a growing military or for DHS. We are not tied to this schedule. We do get to decide. This is the most bi-partisan of matters. After many years in politics, I've discovered when friends on both sides disagree with you … you've hit the middle.