

Maine Congressional Delegation Asks Department of Defense to Keep Navy Exchange/Commissary in Bath-Brunswick Area

Thursday, February 05 2009

WASHINGTON, DC - Today, U.S. Senators Olympia J. Snowe and Susan Collins and Representatives Mike Michaud and Chellie Pingree asked the Department of Defense to continue commissary and exchange services in the Bath/Brunswick area after the Brunswick Naval Air Station (BNAS) closes in September 2011. In a letter to Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense Michael Dominguez, the delegation pointed out that the Mid-Coast area will continue to be home to a significant number of active duty military personnel.

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In the letter, the delegation noted that approximately 1,600 active duty personnel and 8,500 military retirees and their dependents will remain within a 20-mile radius of the site of the current exchange and commissary after NASB closure.

“Their selfless service to our nation has earned them commissary and exchange privileges that should not be denied by the end of military operations at NASB,” the delegation wrote. “We believe that some form of commissary and exchange privilege must remain to ensure these honorable men and women and their families continue to enjoy the quality of life they have earned.”

Department of Defense rules allow for the continued operation of a Commissary and Exchange after a base closes in certain situations, and the delegation believes the Bath/Brunswick area meets the Department requirements.

Commissaries provide low-cost groceries to active duty and retired military personnel and their dependents, while the Exchange sells general merchandise, much like a department store.

Text of the letter is below:

Dear Mr. Dominguez:

We are writing to urge you to authorize the continuation of the commissary and exchange program at Naval Air Station Brunswick (NASB). As you are aware, NASB was selected for closure in the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) 2005. The projected closure date for the base is September 2011. Captain William Fitzgerald, USN, NASB commanding officer, has indicated that the commissary and exchange will close in March of 2011.

We believe that the Bath/Brunswick, Maine, area meets the requirements for continuance of commissary and exchange privileges after NASB closes. According to the January 2008 Defense Eligibility Enrollment Reporting Systems (DEERS) report, there will be approximately 1,600 active duty personnel within a 20-mile radius of the current exchange and commissary after NASB closure. The number and location of these personnel fulfill the general criteria established in Department of Defense Instruction 1330.17, October 8, 2008. This is a significant number of active duty personnel who deserve and rely upon commissary and exchange privileges — privileges identified by the Defense Department as “an integral element of the military pay and benefits package for Active Duty personnel.” Additionally, there

are approximately 8,500 military retirees and their dependents within a 20-mile radius of NASB. Their selfless service to our nation has earned them commissary and exchange privileges that should not be denied by the end of military operations at NASB.

The local active duty, reserve and National Guard military commands that will remain in the Bath/Brunswick area after base closure have expressed great interest in the continuation of commissary and exchange privileges. We are aware that Captain Dean Krestos, USN, commanding officer and Supervisor of Shipbuilding, Conversion and Repair in Bath, and Major General John W. Libby, adjutant general of the state of Maine and commander of the Maine National Guard, agree that these services should remain available to all eligible beneficiaries.

For these reasons, we believe that the Bath/Brunswick area unequivocally meets established Defense Department requirements for the continuance of the commissary and exchange program. Under the extreme circumstances in which it is explicitly evidenced that continuance of the commissary is not supportable, we urge the establishment of a combined commissary and exchange store, per the criteria stipulated in DoD Instruction 1330.17. According to this instruction, these "hybrid" models are authorized, "where an independent commissary is not economically feasible and supportable due to base closure"; We are aware that Captain Krestos, USN, has formally requested this type of combined commissary and exchange through his chain of command.

The Mid-Coast Regional Redevelopment Authority (MRRA) was established by the Maine State Legislature to implement the Master Reuse Plan for NASB. The continued operation of a commissary and exchange program after NASB closes is consistent with the MRRA's Master Reuse Plan.

Due to the size and proximity of the active duty and retiree population, it is extremely important to us and to the current beneficiaries that commissary and exchange privileges remain in the Bath/Brunswick area after NASB closes. After review of applicable Defense Department policies, we believe that some form of commissary and exchange privilege must remain to ensure these honorable men and women and their families continue to enjoy the quality of life they have earned.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. We look forward to working with you to ensure the continuation of commissary and exchange services in the region.

Sincerely,

OLYMPIA J. SNOWE SUSAN M. COLLINS

United States Senator United States Senator

MICHAEL MICHAUD CHELLIE PINGREE

Member of Congress Member of Congress

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