

Clinton urged to soften panel's base-closing plan



WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon is urging that a proposed base closing list be revised

to save thousands of jobs in California — a state crucial to President Clinton's re-election strategy. Defense Secretary William Perry has embraced a compromise that would turn half the jobs over to private business.

California's economy would be hit hard by the recommendations of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission. The nation's most populous state has 54 electoral votes.

Perry briefed the president Wednesday on the commission's extensive package of proposed base closings and realignments. Mary Ellen Glynn, a deputy White House press secretary, said after the 80-minute session ended. The commission's recommended changes are estimated to save the Pentagon \$19.3 billion

over the next 20 years.

In three previous rounds of base closings, the independent commission's recommendations were accepted in their entirety by the White House.

Glynn said Clinton got "a very thorough briefing" from Perry, Deputy Defense Secretary John White and Gen. John Shalikashvili, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. She said the defense officials briefed Clinton on their recommendations for changing the commission's package. A more formal Defense Department recommendation will be presented later in writing.

Glynn said Clinton had made no decisions on this. "Everything is on the table today," she said without discussing the specifics of the Pentagon's recommendations.

Defense officials speaking on condition of anonymity had said earlier that Perry would recommend that Clinton press for just the one change in California. The

Pentagon is willing to accept the commission's dozens of other recommendations, the officials said.

The Perry compromise is intended to defuse a politically charged debate over the proposed closing of McClellan Air Force Base and the loss of its 11,000 military and civilian jobs. McClellan, near Sacramento, is the largest of six military bases in California that the commission has recommended be closed.

The Perry plan would not stop McClellan from closing, but it would be designed to keep roughly half of the 11,000 jobs in the area by allowing the Air Force to hire private companies to do the base's depot maintenance work, the officials said. It is presumed the work would go to California aerospace firms.

Chuck Pizer, a spokesman for the base-closing commission, said the Pentagon had discussed its proposed compromise with the commission's staff but not the voting members.

"Quite honestly, we stand behind the recommendations we have sent to the president," Pizer said.

Although the Perry plan is intended to ease the economic blow to California, the state's leading politicians were quick to criticize it Wednesday.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., released copies of a letter to Clinton in which she said the idea of farming out depot maintenance work that is now done at McClellan would not guarantee the jobs stayed in her state.

"I believe that anything short of keeping McClellan Air Force Base fully open is unacceptable," Feinstein wrote, adding that Clinton should reject the commission's base closure list outright.

"He should reject it in its entirety ... rather than try to fashion some kind of half-baked political solution," said Gov. Pete Wilson, who is seeking the Republican nomination for president.

The White House does not

want to be accused of interfering with the base-closing commission's work, since the panel was created to keep politics out of the economically painful process of shutting down Cold War-era bases. Yet that is the charge being leveled by House Speaker Newt Gingrich and others.

In Marietta, Ga., on Tuesday, Gingrich suggested Clinton was trying to shore up political support for 1996 by rescuing the McClellan depot maintenance jobs.

"Given the president's desperation about California, you can understand what he's trying to do," Gingrich told a news conference before a Fourth of July parade.

"I think with every base on that list, you could ask the question, 'Why doesn't the president care about us?' If the purpose is to have honest people meet as a commission, what does it mean to have politicians interfere?" Gingrich said.

Ticketmaster dodges antitrust suit

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department declined Wednesday to bring an antitrust case against Ticketmaster, the nation's largest distributor of tickets for live sports events and concerts.

A target of widely publicized protests by the rock band Pearl Jam and by consumer groups, the Los Angeles-based company had been under investigation by the department's antitrust division for alleged anticompetitive and monopoly practices.

The company sold 55 million tickets last year for an estimated \$1.6 billion. Pearl Jam claimed the company priced tickets too high for the band's teenage fans.

In a two-sentence statement, the Justice Department said it had informed the parent company, Ticketmaster Holdings Group Inc., that "it is closing its antitrust investigation into that firm's contracting practices."

No lawsuit was filed so the case is over. But the antitrust division warned industry participants that the government "will continue to monitor competitive developments in the ticketing industry." That kind of statement means the government would have to see actions or evidence it currently cannot find before taking any action.

Department spokesman James Sweeney declined to elaborate on the reasons for the government's decision.

Company spokesmen were not immediately available for comment.

Ticketmaster earned an estimated \$240 million last year from its service fees on tickets sold for 3,000 locations around the nation.

Two-thirds of the nation's 10 million concert arena seats are governed by exclusivity contracts between Ticketmaster and arena managers, according to the industry newsletter *Pollstar*.

Pearl Jam fought with Ticketmaster last year over the service charge it tacks on the price of tickets. The band decided to tour without Ticketmaster, but canceled the plans after learning it wouldn't be easy. Two of its members testified against the agency last year at a congressional hearing.

Pearl Jam is itching to perform, said Kelly Curtis, the Seattle-based band's manager. The band recognizes that will mean no concerts in arenas controlled by Ticketmaster contracts, he said.

On June 16 this year, the group launched its first concert tour without Ticketmaster — in smaller locales without appearances in New York or Los Angeles.

Woody Harrelson's dad tries to escape prison

ATLANTA (AP) — Actor Woody Harrelson's father, serving a life sentence for assassinating a federal judge, attempted to escape from federal prison with two other inmates by climbing over a wall, authorities said Wednesday.

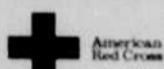
Charles V. Harrelson, 56, and bank robbers Gary L. Settle, 29, and Michael Rivers, 58, surrendered Tuesday night after a warning shot was fired from the guard tower, a prison official said. They climbed a wall with a makeshift rope.

All three inmates were in the special unit Wednesday pending further investigation, prison spokesman Mike Binion said. Harrelson was convicted of assassinating U.S. District Judge John H. Wood Jr. in Texas in 1979.

Evidence at the trial portrayed Harrelson, who already had served time for a murder-for-hire conviction, as a professional hit man hired by drug dealer Jimmy Chagra to kill the judge, who was scheduled to preside over Chagra's drug trial.

Wood, known as "Maximum John" for the stiff sentences that he dealt to drug offenders, was gunned down May 29, 1979, outside his San Antonio condominium.

Chagra was later acquitted of charges he had Wood killed, although his wife and brother were convicted in the plot. Chagra is currently serving time in federal prison on other charges.



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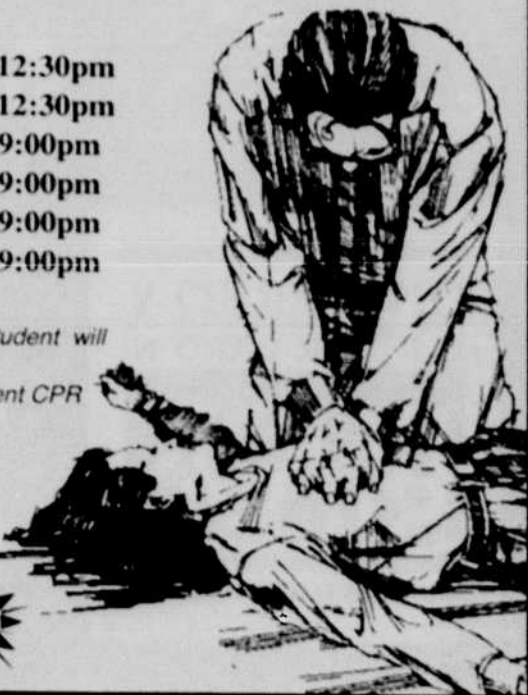
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