

# Maryland Independent

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## **Hoyer: BRAC will Affect Pax River**

**By Kevin Conron and Paul C. Leibe**

Staff Writers

Patuxent River Naval Air Station's strengths could prove to be its greatest weaknesses, U.S. Rep. Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD, 5<sup>th</sup>) warned an audience Tuesday, unless the community maintains a vigil over the Navy's assets.

Hoyer addressed an audience of about 150 people Tuesday at the Patuxent River Naval Air Museum.

"Is Pax going away?" Hoyer said. "Absolutely not," saying the Navy has invested more than \$500 million in facilities. "But components of Pax are in play."

Surrounded by various aircraft tested and developed at the base near Lexington Park, he spoke of what is at stake as the base realignment and closure process unfolds. It's an exercise where the Pentagon looks at military bases around the world and determines if any can be closed or consolidated to save taxpayer funds.

"St. Mary's and Southern Maryland continues to lead the state in terms of economic growth... it is now time to look at the community effort...and band together" to support the naval facilities in St. Mary's and Charles, Hoyer said.

As he spoke on stage were representatives of the Southern Maryland Naval Alliance, the Patuxent Partnership, and the St. Mary's Chamber of Commerce. In the front row there were five empty chairs reserved for the St. Mary's County commissioners. They trickled in as Hoyer continued his talk. They arrived late from their Tuesday weekly meeting in Leonardtown.

Hoyer recently announced he had secured additional funds for ongoing projects at Pax River and Webster Field. The impact of the bases on the region's economy is significant. The Indian Head base accounts for 20 percent of Charles County's gross domestic product. In St. Mary's County 80 percent of the economy is derived from the Navy's presence.

Pax River is home to Naval Air Systems Command and 50 tenant activities. It grew considerably after the 1991 and 1993 base realignment process, when naval operations in Warminster, Pa. And Crystal City, Va. were consolidated at Pax River.

The four base realignment and closure rounds since 1988 resulted in closing 152 major installations and 235 smaller bases. The savings amounted to \$17 billion through fiscal 2001 and annual savings of \$7 billion since then.

Something's going to happen to Pax River, Hoyer said. "Pax River will not remain untouched. We could gain or we could lose, but we will likely not look identical to where we are today once the BRAC of 2005 is complete."

Before the BRAC meeting at the museum, Hoyer toured the Special Communications Requirements Facility at Webster Field in St. Inigoes. Bob Waxman, Webster Field's top civilian said, "This should be named the Hoyer Building. He got the money for us to get it built." Hoyer's efforts, Waxman said, secured the \$5.2 million needed for the facility's construction in 2002.

During the tour, Hoyer met with facility workers, who led the congressman on a tour of the projects that are now underway.

Hoyer toured the Joint Force Headquarters Mobile Communications Vehicle, being built for the U.S. Army, and he saw the Satellite Emergency Communications Response Vehicle being built for the federal government.

Hoyer also toured one of the Unified Command Suites vehicles being built at Webster Field. Webster Field workers have already built 36 command suites and will assemble 14 more in the coming months. Eventually at least one of these vehicles will be stationed in every state.

One of the things that makes the facility unique, Waxman explained, is that "we don't have customers who need something years down the road. They need things much sooner and we've been able to fill that need."

Hoyer said the facility "illustrates the important and unique work being done at St. Inigoes that is redefining mobile communications technology and providing a critical service to federal agencies who face the challenges of interoperability."

"All of this work," Hoyer added, "is being accomplished because of your talents. I am so proud of the kinds of people we have here, and the quality and enthusiasm you bring to your jobs."