

"FIFTH DISTRICT REPORT"
BY CONGRESSMAN PAUL TSONGAS

GOOD NEWS FOR HANSCOM AIR FORCE BASE IN BEDFORD

After months of meetings, official reviews, lobbying, hearings, and consultations, the Air Force has reversed a decision that would have resulted in the relocation of Cambridge Research Laboratories (CRL) from Hanscom Base in Bedford.

Two weeks ago, as the House of Representatives was considering their latest energy bill, I received word that Secretary of the Air Force John L. McLucas had requested a meeting to discuss the Hanscom-CRL situation. It was apparent that the Secretary was finally ready to relate to us the final decision on CRL.

Last winter, the Air Force announced a realignment plan that included the transfer of the Cambridge Research Laboratories to Kirtland Air Force Base in New Mexico. The plan would have adversely affected the future of the Bedford installation, the Electronics Systems Division. 452 civilian personnel would have been transferred to New Mexico. 200 other employees would have lost their jobs. Over \$8 million in related contract funds to local businesses would have been cut-off.

Within one month, we had succeeded in organizing strong opposition to the relocation plans with the Massachusetts Congressional Delegation. Meanwhile, "SAVE" (Scientists Allied to Veto Extinction) had produced an authoritative study which challenged the economics and feasibility of the relocation. The work of SAVE was critical in the reversal of the Air Force decision. Margaret Hill, President of the Federal employees union did an outstanding job in coordinating opposition and working with my staff and with the offices of Senators Kennedy and Brooke. Opinions of scientists like Dr. Bernard Vonnegut of the Air Force Scientific Advisory Board who wrote Secretary McLucas that the decision had been "an extraordinarily bad one" greatly assisted our efforts.

As I sat down on July 31 with Sec. McLucas, Senator Kennedy, Senator Brooke, and a score of Air Force Generals and other officials, it was still unclear what the decision would be. In the last few weeks previous to the meeting, Air Force officials had been unable to tell us when a decision would be made. In addition, we had been refused copies of two critical reviews that we had persuaded the Air Force to conduct. Therefore, the signs were not promising.

Secretary McLucas began the meeting by informing us that he had 'some good news and some bad news.' He distributed a letter that looked distressingly like so-called "Pentagonese." Six paragraphs and one and a half pages later I was still unsure of the Air Force decision. The next paragraph was the good news...

"I find that the move of the Air Force Geophysics Laboratory (CRL) to Kirtland is not now feasible for financial reasons. The move to Kirtland would cost \$6.8 million and would not have produced sufficient savings to be considered cost-effective."

It turned out that the bad news was simply that Congressionally mandated civilian reductions would affect Hanscom as well as other domestic bases. This had been expected. The anticipated hold on transfers from Rome Air Force Base in New York would prevent Hanscom from actually gaining new employees, but in a critical decision, Secretary McLucas informed us that Rome's research operations would be headquartered at Hanscom. This means that the future of the Bedford base would be one of increasing importance. Rather than waiting for an eventual phase out of civilian research functions in the Fifth District and Greater Boston that are Air Force connected, there will be gradually increasing dependence on CRL and Hanscom.

So in the end, there was far more good news than bad. The cooperation and the hard work it took to reverse the relocation decision should not be underestimated. This area has learned through difficult experience that decisions to close military bases are rarely changed. In addition, we must properly recognize the responsiveness and open-mindedness shown by Secretary McLucas. The two blue ribbon panels appointed to review the original Air Force decision were highly qualified. When the studies recommended against relocations, the findings were considered and discussed, not swept under the rug.

With the difficult economic times that our area has had to live through, I can tell you that I had to restrain a cheer when I realized that we had won this tough battle. Again, I want to express my thanks and appreciation to the large number of individuals who helped save Cambridge Research Laboratories.