

Lawmakers protest Depot plan

Oregon legislators send letter to Sec. of Defense Gates

June 25, 2011 – Hermiston Herald – By Luke Hegdal

Oregon lawmakers fought back against a Department of Defense ruling that could nullify 20 years and \$1 million worth of planning for closure of the Umatilla Chemical Depot under Base Closure and Realignment Commission legislation.

Oregon Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, along with Congressman Greg Walden, sent a letter to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Thursday, that outlines their opposition to the decision.

“Unfortunately, we recently discovered that the Office of General Counsel has decided that because the destruction of the chemical weapons at UMCD won't be complete by September 15, the facility will be closed and disposed outside of BRAC,” the lawmakers wrote. “As you know, Congress created BRAC as a way to consolidate and realign military facilities – saving taxpayer dollars. To try to use the BRAC statute to keep UMCD in federal hands and waste more than \$1 million is shameful.”

The trio claim the Department of Defense is misinterpreting the original BRAC legislation, and is ignoring subsequent BRAC rulings that favor extending the closure date.

“The Commission acknowledged that the closure will have to happen when the demilitarization mission is completed, even if that is after September 2011.”

If the Department of Defense ruling is upheld, the roughly 20,000 acres of land currently owned by the Army would likely be sold at public auction, instead of being divvied up between the Oregon National Guard, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and Umatilla and Morrow Counties.

Wyden, Merkley and Walden asked the Department of Defense reconsider the ruling, adding that they would seek a legislative change “to eliminate any doubt of your authority to continue the closure of UMCD under BRAC after September 2011.”