

Without a tinge of nervousness in his voice, Del. John Bohanan Jr. talked on his mobile phone on his way to Capitol Hill last Thursday to investigate rumors that the Pentagon might release some of its bases realignment and closure recommendations one day early.

To listen to Bohanan (D-St. Mary's) it was hardly noticeable that less than 24 hours later the Department of Defense would finally make public its recommendations on which military installations to close or consolidate, known commonly as BRAC, that could have massive impacts on Southern Maryland.

Bohanan's calmness was rooted in his confidence that the seamless operation between the Navy alliances in Southern Maryland, combined with the work of his boss, U.S. Rep. Steny H. Hoyer (D-Md. 5th), over the past decade in advocating for the Patuxent River Naval Air Station and the Naval Surface Warfare Center in Indian Head, would pay off.

So when the recommendations were released Friday that Pax River would gain a few dozen jobs and that Indian Head would remain intact and not be closed as some had feared, Bohanan's confidence and Hoyer's oft-repeated statements that "we don't fear BRACs" were ratified.

"I've been in office for a long time, and there is nothing that I have worked on harder and more regularly than the issue of protecting, strengthening and enhancing our missions on these bases," Hoyer said in an interview Monday.

"This is the culmination of 10 years of a community effort," Bohanan said. "I always enjoy working as a team – working together for the good of the community, and our is probably as good as any in the country at focusing on and supporting our installations."

The release of the BRAC recommendations on Friday was the crescendo of a multiyear, multifaceted effort to preserve Southern Maryland's military installations and the thousands of jobs that fuel the regions economy.

For the better part of the past two years, Hoyer and Bohanan have set up dozens of meetings at

the Pentagon to tell the story of Southern Maryland's bases and explain the importance of keeping them open.

This shoe-leather approach was different from the advocacy that Hoyer used in previous BRAC rounds, but it was a strategy that proved to be effective, the congressman said.

"John and I started an effort where we would go to the Pentagon – going office to office – and talking to people who were at all levels of the process," Hoyer said, "This has proven to be very successful because we were able to pick up the phone and make calls to find out information."

Bohanan, a top aide and military liaison for Hoyer since 1993 who has been working on military issues in the public and private sector for more than 25 years, is the go-between from the Navy alliances and the bases to Hoyer. This Hoyer-Bohanan tandem has contributed to the bases' well-being, according to officials who closely follow affairs in Southern Maryland.

"They are ambassadors to the highest levels of government, and they are extremely effective," said Tim Smith, a military consultant who retired recently after being executive director at Pax River for more than 10 years. "The thing that sets them apart is that they understand the stuff that is going on at the base, and they are focused on it on a daily, year round basis."

"I can't think of anyone more visible in this process than Steny Hoyer and John Bohanan," said former Calvert County Commissioner Robert L. "Bobby" Swann, a member of the Maryland Military Strategic Planning, a group that was formed from a bill that Bohanan sponsored in the Maryland General Assembly. "They really understand this stuff, and they are very valuable to the region."

Protecting the bases is an effort that crosses partisan lines and includes support from county and state government, chambers of commerce and the Navy alliance on the local level to the well-heeled consultants who advocate for the bases as they walk the halls in Washington.

"We have a certain synergy here that is special and has worked very well in the past," Hoyer said. "The strategies we use really complement one another."

“If you ever want to see a community effort, this was it,” said Dick Gregory, a member of the board of directors of the Indian Head Defense Alliance and a former of Charles County Economic Development Commission. “It was the business community, the nonprofits, the local governments, the state government and our federal representatives all coming together. It was a truly remarkable effort.”

In talking about the BRAC process, Hoyer deflects credit to Bohanan and the Navy Alliances for the bases' success. But many Maryland politicians credit Hoyer for this success.

“There is no doubt in my mind that those bases in Southern Maryland stayed off the list because of Steny Hoyer,” said Comptroller William Donald Schaffer (D), a former two-term governor who worked closely with Hoyer during previous rounds of BRAC. “He won't take the credit, but he deserves it.”

Former U.S. Rep. Beverly Byron of Frederick, who was a BRAC commissioner in 1993, described Hoyer as “tireless.”

The alliances work at the liaisons between the bases and the community, funneling information to Hoyer and other leaders on enhancing and protecting the bases.

Todd Morgan, president of the Southern Maryland Navy Alliance, which is devoted to protecting Pax River, uses a football analogy to describe Hoyer's work for the base.

He said the Navy alliance and community groups act as blockers and Hoyer is the quarterback who puts the play in motion – the key being that they have to work together to succeed.

“He's the political mastermind behind all this,” Morgan said. “He pushes the ball down the field.”