

Jones plans meeting with Navy on OLF plans

By Cindy Beamon
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Congressman Walter B. Jones, R-N.C., has plans to meet with the Secretary of the Navy this month to get answers about a possible outlying landing field in Camden.

Jones said Thursday that the Navy's delay in deciding its home base for the Super Hornet has left Northeastern North Carolina in economic limbo.

Uncertainty over the Navy's plans for a practice landing strip for Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia Beach, Va., is making it difficult for local counties to attract business, he said.

"Camden County Commissioners have attempted to recruit industry to come to their county, but because of the uncertain future of the OLF, many companies have rejected Camden as a good place for future development," Jones wrote to Secretary Ray Mabus in May.

Jones said Mabus has responded to the letter and the two plan to meet this month.

Camden and Currituck officials say they also want to know if they can end their expensive fight to prevent Hales Lake from being the Navy's top choice.

Together, the two counties have spent about \$1 million since the Navy announced in September 2007 plans to study possible sites, including Hales Lake in Camden. In 2011, the Navy announced it would suspend its airfield study until 2014 while it concentrated on its plans for the West Coast.

"The DON's inability to finalize its OLF plans has caused considerable stress and problems for my constituents," Jones said in the letter.

Jones said he's not expecting a final answer from Mabus when they meet this month but believes the nation's "deep economic trouble" and limitations at NAS Oceana will force the Navy to consider other choices.

"With all the problems at Oceana, I believe they are looking at multiple options that are not necessarily OLFs," said Jones.

County Manager Mike Renshaw said one high-ranking retired Navy official has suggested the Navy may be considering the West Coast for its Super Hornet base.

On other issues before Congress:

- Jones said he's "upset" about the recent disclosure that the National Security Agency is secretly collecting millions of phone records of U.S. customers of Verizon. Jones said citizens should not be quick to give up their freedoms in exchange for the promise of security. He also found the Department of

Justice's decision to seize the phone records of reporters and editors at The Associated Press "unacceptable."

- Jones said he agrees with removing control of sexual assault investigations in the military from a chain of command and placing them with an independent review panel.
- Jones said he will vote against the comprehensive immigration reform bill moving through the Senate. He said the first step to immigration reform should be stemming the flow of people entering the country illegally.

Once that problem has been stabilized, then Congress should debate reform one step at a time, rather than trying to solve all the problems at once.