



Chamber's military committee leaders resign to form new organization

By CATHERINE MACRAE HOCKMUTH

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Frank Hewitt announced Thursday that he has resigned from his post as chairman of the Military Affairs Advisory Council (MAAC) within the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce. The council's vice chairman, Mike Woiwode, is also stepping down.

The two have formed a new nonprofit organization to promote and support military and defense industrial interests in San Diego.

"We have decided to commit our volunteer time to an organization that will have as its singular purpose support of the military and defense industry-related issues in the San Diego region," Hewitt said in a widely distributed e-mail. "That organization must be free to deal with issues the military won't raise in public, or issues on which they feel that they can't get a fair hearing."

Hewitt said the new organization, named the San Diego Military Advisory Council, would be able to develop and argue positions more quickly, particularly on topics that conflict with the chamber. He declined to offer specific examples, however.

"There are no singular issues," he said. "There needs to be an entity that focuses on support of the regional military and even the congressional staff positions on issues that can be moved forward in support of the military."

Hewitt expects to have a positive relationship with the chamber and said they will likely be in support of each other "99 percent" of the time. The chamber is focused on supporting business interests, while the new council will concentrate on military interests. "Not necessarily are those always the same," Hewitt said. "In the past they haven't been and in the future they won't be."

The Defense Department's 2005 base closure and realignment (BRAC) is at the top of the new council's agenda. Hewitt said the council would be particularly concerned with preserving DOD's research and development infrastructure in San Diego. Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command is a prime example. SPAWAR develops and buys space and communications systems for the Navy and other military agencies. According to the command, contractors receive about 80 percent of the \$4.8 billion SPAWAR spends annually, with more than \$1.2 billion flowing directly to the San Diego region.

Hewitt said the council would focus on creating an "interface" with defense officials in Washington, D.C., and California's congressional delegation on the BRAC issue.

The council, which now has half a dozen members, is in the process of selecting board members and has scheduled its first meeting March 16 at the Admiral Kidd Club at the Fleet Anti-Submarine Training Center. The board could have between nine and 20 members.

Hewitt anticipates holding monthly breakfast meetings that will be open to anyone who is interested. The first meeting next month will offer some networking opportunities and will likely feature an address from a military official, he said.

Mitch Mitchell, vice president of public policy at the chamber, said there would be ample opportunity for collaborative efforts with the new advisory council.

"Obviously the chamber has 130 years of working with the military community here in San Diego to not only improve certain issues that are important to them but also to help enhance the situation for our military and defense-related businesses in the region," Mitchell said.

"The management of the chamber is still looking forward to working with the members of the new committee and in the end we have several things to work on, including BRAC."

Ben Bagnus, a member of the chamber's board of directors, will appoint new leaders for the

MAAC. Mitchell said the decision-making process is under way. Chamber officials were aware of discussions about forming a new organization and finding ways to collaborate, according to Mitchell. MAAC has about 250 members, and 20 people on its executive committee.

