



MILITARY | GOVERNMENT CONTRACTING

Chairman: Hank Salcido

Purpose

With some 15,000 military, civilian and contractor employees and military and civilian retirees, Keesler Air Force Base provides an annual economic impact in excess of \$1.5 billion. Adding to the base's value to Biloxi, Keesler's military and civilian personnel are active members – and often leaders – in most of Biloxi's community and business organizations. Keesler Medical Center, while serving active and retired military and their families, has been the training ground for many of Biloxi's current health care providers, and Keesler retirees compose a sizeable portion of the community's business operators.

Hurricane Katrina not only inflicted millions of dollars in damage to Keesler's physical structures, but had a detrimental effect on military families and the civilian workforce stationed at Keesler. Damaged housing has displaced many Keesler families. The purpose of this committee is to make recommendations that preserve the mission of Keesler Air Force Base and provide appropriate housing and other facilities necessary to allow this important economic asset to thrive.

Recommendations

104. *Supplement available on-base housing through public or private sources at a price range in line with current government housing allowances.*

Katrina's 20-foot surge destroyed 732 housing units and damaged several hundred more, forcing Keesler personnel to be issued unaccompanied travel orders due to lack of family housing. Plans call for only 1,067 military housing units (MHU) to be rebuilt, less than half the pre-Katrina inventory. Lack of housing not only affects the quality of life for military and civilians stationed at Keesler — and makes a Keesler assignment much less attractive — the reduction in Keesler families adversely affects the entire community. Biloxi's public school budgets are losing impact funds due to reduced students and the "special needs" program is reduced by declining enrollment.

105. *Review Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) plans for North/South Connector routes to ensure Keesler's near- and long-term plans (particularly housing needs) are not adversely affected.* MDOT appears to be considering building a North/South connector using the Alternative "H" option. In July 2001, Brig. Gen. Roosevelt Mercer, speaking for Keesler AFB, made clear to MDOT that "option E is our favored alternative since it will not impact Keesler's missions. The remaining proposals (F, F-1, H, H-1) will impact both Keesler's housing areas and existing recreational facilities." The opinion expressed by Brig. Gen. Mercer remains the opinion of Keesler AFB today. Coupled with the damage from Hurricane Katrina, the proposed connector route option "H" would have an extremely negative impact on Keesler by taking away much of the land necessary for building base housing and facilities. There is a sense of urgency on this decision, as Keesler is preparing to award the housing construction contract.
106. *Support Keesler's airspace management requirements to protect the integrity of Keesler's flying mission and its potential impact on the future of Keesler Air Force Base.* In September 2003, the City of Biloxi began operating under a new Land Development Ordinance that became public policy following extensive public input. Included in the Ordinance was Article 20: "Airport Navigation and Noise Abatement," which states, in part, "the purpose of the ordinance is to protect the health, welfare and safety of the general public by incorporating the safety standards mandated by the pre-existing military flight operations currently utilizing navigable airspace." Protecting Keesler's flying mission is imperative. Encroachment, density and height restrictions all continue to be vital to the security and safekeeping of Keesler. Keesler officials are reviewing current airspace management requirements and will provide updated data to the City of Biloxi.

107. *Work closely with Keesler AFB on land use issues including Keesler gate locations, additional family housing and recreational needs. As stated in the Transportation committee report, Keesler Air Force Base is planning to utilize a new Main Gate on Division Street. The base currently operates with gates on White Avenue (south gate), Pass Road (west gate) and Bayview Avenue (east gate). The opening and use of Division Street as a main gate will divert some traffic to the I-110 interchange on Division Street. Family housing needs at KAFB have already been documented and, with them, sufficient recreational facilities. Protecting Keesler's mission by supporting land use and airspace management requirements is vital not only to Keesler, but to the economic health of Biloxi.*
108. *Pursue Keesler's medical vision for the Mississippi Coast and work with Keesler, the U.S. Veterans Administration and the University of Mississippi Medical School to coordinate common needs and explore other viable options to provide and enhance available medical support. The civilian medical community cannot absorb the medical needs of Keesler and its personnel. Keesler's medical center will be rebuilt to approximately pre-Katrina status by late 2007. The City of Biloxi should work with the University of Mississippi Medical Schools and the Veterans Administration to support the Graduate Medical Education program which will not only train physicians for Air Force medical service, but many of these physicians can become part of the Biloxi civilian medical community upon their retirement.*



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