



## Congress O.K.'s Defense Bill

Denise Etheridge, The Coastal Courier, December 22, 2009

Now that Congress passed the 2010 Defense Appropriations Bill, communities that were adversely impacted by the cancellation of brigades, like Hinesville, can apply for a portion of \$40 million in assistance funds. The \$636.3 billion appropriations bill for the Department of Defense was passed by the U.S. House on Dec. 16 and by an 88-10 Senate vote on the morning of Dec. 19. The legislation was signed into law by President Barack Obama the same day. The bill includes \$40 million in funding that has been set aside for communities that have been negatively affected by military base closures or realignments, base expansions and contract or program cancellations. In Dec. 2007, Fort Stewart began planning for the addition of another brigade combat team. This fifth brigade would have added about 3,500 soldiers plus their families and additional military support personnel. When the brigade was canceled in June, Hinesville and Liberty County, as well as Long, Bryan and Tattnall counties, local cities, school systems and private businesses lost money that had been invested in anticipation of the brigade's arrival. "Whenever we announce to communities an expansion of our military and we call upon them to provide the money, the infrastructure and the manpower to support those troops, it is important for us to live up to the responsibilities we have and see to it that to the maximum extent possible those communities are made whole," said Sen. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga. Mayor Jim Thomas, along with state Rep. Al Williams, D-Midway, Liberty County Commission Chairman John McIver and Hinesville businessman Clay Sikes, met with Isakson, Sen. Saxby Chambliss, R-Ga., and Rep. Jack Kingston, R-Ga., and Secretary of the Army John McHugh on Dec. 9. Local leaders and national representatives discussed the impact the loss of the brigade has had on Fort Stewart and its surrounding communities. "Once we talked with our leaders, Sen. Chambliss, Sen. Isakson and Rep. Kingston, they agreed we needed to be recompensed," Thomas said. The mayor said community leaders will have to wait to see how the funds will be distributed. The Office of Economic Adjustment will determine eligibility and allocate funds, he said. "They (OEA) have to study it first and tell us what we can and cannot do with those funds," Thomas said. The mayor added assistance also may be available for the county and the Liberty County School System, but said that Hinesville has probably made the most investment. The Fort Stewart Growth Management Partnership, initially established to help plan for the growth that was expected from the addition of a fifth brigade, has completed an economic impact analysis on the effects the brigade's cancellation has had on the region. "We worked on the study for two months," said partnership director Jeff Ricketson. The economic analysis indicates that nearly \$77 million was spent by the private and public sector across the four-county area — Liberty, Long, Bryan and Tattnall — in anticipation of the brigade. About \$43.8 million was spent by the private sector for residential and commercial development, and a total of \$33 was invested by the public sector. In addition, 6,380 potential jobs also were lost according to the recently released analysis. Ricketson said the group will move forward with a growth management plan once all research and analysis are complete. The partnership will gather more public input in February and March, he said.

### The Numbers:

- \$626.3 billion: Amount of Fiscal Year 2010 appropriations for Department of Defense military programs.
- \$40 million: Amount of money earmarked in the bill to help communities negatively affected by program cancellations.
- 3,500: Number of soldiers a fifth brigade would have brought to Fort Stewart.
- \$77 million: Estimated amount spent by Liberty and other area counties to prepare for the brigade.