

# EDITORIAL

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## Delay could help L.B. shipyard

**P**resident Bill Clinton's proposal to delay some military base closure hearings until after the 1996 elections is a bitter pill for workers at the Long Beach Naval Shipyard. Shipyard employees, members of the Save Our Shipyard Committee and city officials have worked nonstop to keep the yard open.

More than \$250,000 has been spent on consultants, research and lobbying Congress and the Pentagon to keep one of the nation's most productive drydocks open for repairing the Navy's big ships. The shipyard survived by a narrow margin during the 1991 and 1993 closure hearings, and efforts to prevent the facility from being placed on the 1995 closure list are well underway.

It is understandable that shipyard workers, and others who are dependent on the thousands of dollars that flow into Long Beach each year from ship repairs, want a verdict as quickly as possible. However, a victory for Long Beach in 1995 doesn't mean the shipyard won't be included on a future hit list.

The proposal by Utah Rep. James Hanson to put off all base closure hearings until 1997 has merit. The proposal, endorsed by Long Beach Rep. Steve Horn and some Long Beach city officials, would give the economy more time to absorb the military cuts that have devastated Southern California. It would also give the military time to turn over to local communities the land and facilities from bases the Department of Defense closed in 1989, 1991 and 1993. The DoD must find the

money to close the bases and, in many cases, clean up the toxic waste the military has left behind.

Admittedly, politicians, including Clinton and Horn, who are up for re-election in 1996 would benefit from a delay because they won't have to face the ire of constituents whose hometowns were impacted by another base closure.

But this also benefits those trying to save the shipyard. Those years of delay could be used to further demonstrate the shipyard's importance to the Naval fleet.

There are only five drydocks left open in the country, three of which are considered untouchable: Pearl Harbor, Norfolk, Va., and Bremerton, Wash. Horn has already asked for an investigation into why there has been a drop in the number of ship repairs scheduled for the Long Beach yard. His efforts to persuade Navy officials to apportion work fairly would be aided by a delay in the closure hearings.

And while it's difficult to keep the volunteer members of the Save Our Shipyards Committee together for an extended period of time, it's not impossible. Committee members could implement plans to counter San Diego's private shipyard owners who are waging a vigorous campaign to prove that private industry can do a better job than the naval shipyards.

In the meantime, California's economy might well recover and bring with it a healthy business climate that would sustain the region's economy, with or without the benefit of the shipyard.