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Grimm Keeps Army Corps at Fort Hamilton

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He Says New Law Will Save the Base

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BAY RIDGE — Buried deep within the bill signed into law by President Barack Obama to avoid a government shutdown, there is a provision that will keep the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers from moving out of the Fort Hamilton Army Base.

Obama signed the bill to keep the federal government funded on Saturday. Under the Fort Hamilton-related provision, the corps is prohibited from using government funds to relocate to another space. The corps had expressed an interest earlier this year to leave Fort Hamilton for swanky office space in Tribeca.

U.S. Rep. Michael Grimm (R-Bay Ridge/Staten Island), who successfully pushed to have the language inserted into the government funding bill, said he was pleased that the legislation was now law.

“It is an enormous victory for the people of Brooklyn and the Fort Hamilton community to solidify in law the corps’ permanent home at the fort,” Grimm said.

When officials from the corps first made it known that they were considering leaving the Bay Ridge military base, Grimm boldly said it would not happen on his watch. “I meant it when I said the corps will leave Fort Hamilton over my dead body,” he said.

The new law keeping the corps put will go a long way toward saving the army base from closure when the next round of military base shutdowns takes place, according to Grimm. The federal government conducts a round of base closures once every five years or so. The last round took place in 2005.

Grimm and other officials said they were concerned that the departure of the corps would strip the 186-year-old Fort Hamilton of much of its military mission and leave it vulnerable to a shutdown by a new Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC).

Without the corps there is little justification for keeping Fort Hamilton open, according to Bill Guarinello, president of the Fort Hamilton Citizens Action Committee. A move by the corps would “seriously hamper our efforts to defend Fort Hamilton in the next BRAC,” he said.

“The Army Corps’ attempt to relocate from Fort Hamilton posed a serious threat to the future of a military installation that is critically important to Brooklyn and all of New York City,” Guarinello said.

The president authorizes the formation of a BRAC. The way the federal base closure law is structured, the BRAC comes up with a base closure and realignment list. Congress must vote the entire list up or down with no changes. What this means is that if a base is on the closure list, it will close.

Fort Hamilton has been home to the North Atlantic Division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for 10 years. The corps would have paid \$1 million a year in rent in Tribeca, Grimm said.

Named after Alexander Hamilton, the Fort Hamilton Army Base opened in 1825. Situated on the Bay Ridge waterfront, it is the only active military post in New York City.

In recent months, there has been a collective effort by elected officials to beef up the fort’s military mission. U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) visited the base in August and announced her support for the idea of having federal agencies set up satellite offices at the fort. The FBI and the Department of Homeland Security were two of the entities mentioned as possible tenants.

“New York remains the number one terror target for terrorists around the world who want to harm Americans. Fort Hamilton’s greatest strength lies in its ability to serve as the central national security hub for federal agencies in New York City,” Gillibrand said.

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