

Hm Adw  
12/1/86

# DeRussy hearings to draw proponents out this week

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Proponents of turning Fort DeRussy in Waikiki into a tourist convention center will be out in force this week to try to convince a key congressional committee of the idea's merits.

But they will have to contend with Hawaii Rep. Neil Abercrombie, a vocal opponent and a member of the House Armed Services Committee.

The committee will hear testimony on Fort DeRussy tomorrow and Wednesday. The sessions, which begin each day at 9 a.m., will be at the East-West Center's Jefferson Hall.

Ten committee members, including Abercrombie, are scheduled to participate in the hearings.

"I'm hoping that (the committee) will see the rather unique situation we face here at Fort DeRussy," Abercrombie said.

Abercrombie believes the cost of purchasing the Waikiki post from the Army — the best figure is \$400 million, he says — would be money lost by the state.

"That's an enormous amount of (state) taxpayer money that could not be invested in Hawaii," Abercrombie said.

In return, the purchase would "serve only to enhance the fortunes, literally and figuratively, of only a handful of people." A private convention center authority, composed largely of hotel and tourist industry officials, would likely run the complex.

Abercrombie is also concerned that the state would have to cover any losses by the convention center.

Backers of a center believe a facility designed to handle large groups would be a boost to Hawaii tourism. The major "centers" are now hotel facilities and the Neal Blaisdell Center, which is located outside Waikiki.

The key to a successful convention center, proponents maintain, is a facility within easy walking distance of most Waikiki hotels.

Dr. Richard Kelley, head of the Outrigger Hotels and a major convention center backer, believes that timing is critical.

"Now's the time to go ahead. It's absolutely urgent. We're losing our competitive position. If we don't move right now, we won't have it," Kelley said.

Despite record numbers of tourists, Kelley warned another economic downturn could put the visitor industry here through another recession.

"Enough legislators have been here long enough to remember what it was like a few years ago," Kelley said.

"The convention business is somewhat recession proof," Kelley said. It also attracts "quality" visitors, those who spend more per visit, he added.

The area under consideration covers 45 mauka acres bordered by Kalia Road, Ala Moana, Kala-kaua and Maluhia Road.

The beachfront portion of Fort DeRussy and the military Hale Koa Hotel would not be affected by a sale.

Fort DeRussy is home for the U.S. Army Reserve. Hawaii Sen. Daniel Inouye, a strong backer of selling the post, has said that given its location, Fort DeRussy is the Army's most



The future of Fort DeRussy — shown here with convention center site in foreground — is the subject of House Armed Services Committee hearings this week.

expensive parade ground.

But Abercrombie believes that in addition to the purchase price, the state would be responsible for covering the cost of relocating reserve units. That could be as much as \$25 million to \$50 million, he said.

Abercrombie said he spoke with Army Secretary John Marsh Jr., who was recently in Hawaii.

"He said we'd have to pay for the cost of the land and relocation. I said, 'Could that be as much as \$25 (million) or \$50 million?' He didn't disagree with me," Abercrombie said.

A citizens' group this year tried to block the commercial development of Fort DeRussy. It was able to place on the November ballot an initiative question that, if approved, would have

banned either a convention center or hotel at the installation.

However, the measure failed by a 149,285-to-90,392 margin.

Until recently, Congress had prevented the sale of Fort DeRussy. But lawmakers this year changed the law to allow the Army secretary to sell or dispose of Fort DeRussy after Aug. 1, 1957, and after giving Congress 60 days' notice.

The committee members scheduled to attend the hearings in addition to Abercrombie are Chairman W.C. "Dah" Daniel, D-Va.; Rep. Bill Nichols, D-Ala.; Rep. William Dickinson, R-Ala.; Rep. Ronald Dellums, D-Calif.; Rep. C.W. Bill Young, R-Fla.; Rep. David O'B. Martin, R-N.Y.; Rep. Herbert Bateman, R-Va.; Rep. Tommy Robinson, D-Ark.; and Rep. Ben Blas, R-Guam.