

A new 'magic bullet'?

Specter's improbable plan for the Navy Yard

U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter has a vision for the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard: With generous federal assistance, it will be transformed over time to a thriving maritime center that combines commercial shipbuilding with a scaled-down military role.

It could be a brilliant way to save jobs and revenues, but the odds of success are slim. Even worse, it could forestall other efforts to chart a more realistic future for the Navy Yard.

The senator's strategy has something in common with his famed "magic bullet" theory. It relies on an improbable chain of events.

He wants the city to vigorously pursue a 22-month-old lawsuit that challenges the Navy's base-closing selection process. The city appears to have a good case, but a victory could well prove hollow. There simply isn't much new Navy business for Philadelphia, or anywhere else.

Sen. Specter argues that a win in the lawsuit would force the government to give Philadelphia *something* by way of settlement. But what?

The Clinton administration, the senator suggests, might make a major investment in Philadelphia to resurrect the moribund domestic shipbuilding industry. Mr. Clinton has indeed talked of a "national ship-

building initiative," but the Defense Department reports there's no money in the budget to launch it.

Could such a venture succeed? Even though the shipping industry points to \$356 billion worth of ship overhaul and repair work waiting to be done someplace in the world, the U.S. hasn't gotten any of that work in years. Chances are it will follow other recent jobs to low-wage Pacific Rim countries.

There is a better course, and the Rendell administration is taking it: pursuing a diverse strategy that seeks non-maritime options for the Navy Yard — such as high-tech industry and light and heavy manufacturing — while preserving Sen. Specter's long-shot options.

What should be happening now is for those supporting the Specter plan, including U.S. Sen. Harris Wofford (D., Pa.), to join Mayor Rendell and U.S. Rep. Tom Foglietta (D., Phila.) on this dual track.

The underlying problem is that there aren't many great ideas out there. Indeed, the recent Coopers & Lybrand study of the Navy Yard's prospects bluntly acknowledged, "There are no home runs."

Still, it's still better to hit a single than to strike out swinging for the fences.

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