

Specter blasts report on shipyard

The senator criticized the city's "doomsday scenario." He is suing to keep the yard open.

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U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter had harsh words yesterday for a city report concluding that there will be no federal bailout of the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard, which is scheduled to close in 1996.

He begs to differ.

"We believe there is a realistic chance to keep the Navy yard open and keep the work coming in," Specter said at a news conference in his Philadelphia office.

"We do not need to issue a report that says we're throwing in the towel. This approach is potentially disastrous."

The Rendell administration report, which will be presented tomorrow to the mayor's commission on the shipyard's future, warns that the only hope for the 5,300 shipyard workers is private investment and retraining.

Specter said such a "doomsday scenario" jeopardized his efforts to draw more government work to the shipyard and explore the possibility

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of a joint public-private investment.

"It undercuts our ability to negotiate with the Department of Defense," he said. "If we've given up hope, why should they fulfill expectations that are nonexistent."

He also said that the city's report could affect the outcome of the lawsuit to overturn the Bush administration's decision to close the nation's oldest shipyard. The lawsuit is before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Specter (R., Pa.), U.S. Reps. Curt Weldon (R., Pa.) and Robert E. Andrews (D., N.J.), and union officials have sued the federal government, contending that the Navy rigged the base-closing process by suppressing evidence from its own experts that the shipyard be kept open.

Specter said that he had spoken with President Clinton about the shipyard and that the President had agreed to get involved in the issue. He has also spoken with the secretary of the Navy, who he said expressed an interest in working out an arrangement to keep the Navy yard open with some government work and some private work, Specter wrote in a letter to Mayor Rendell on behalf of himself, Weldon and Andrews.

"There is a strong possibility of future work from the Navy," Specter wrote to Rendell in the letter, released yesterday. "To state the con-

trary is to articulate a self-fulfilling prophecy."

David L. Cohen, the mayor's chief of staff, said yesterday that the city had concluded that there was "no chance" the Navy would continue to send work to the shipyard at the level it has done in the past.

Even if the Navy continued to send some work here, Cohen said, the bulk of the jobs could only be saved through private investment.

"We the city have reached the conclusion that it would now be reckless to count on the government to be the sole employer at the Navy yard," Cohen said. "We cannot put all our eggs in a government basket."

"We have to have an alternative plan where we have private employment in order to generate jobs."

Future proposed uses for the largest manufacturing site in the region include a smaller, privately owned shipyard that could employ up to 1,000 workers. Other uses discussed in the report include a national maritime research center, manufacturing plants, warehouses and offices. The Navy plans to keep 500 acres of the facility and relinquish 900 acres.

Although Specter complained to reporters that the mayor had not returned his call of yesterday morning, Cohen said Specter and his staff had known about the report for several weeks.