

Bill seeks AF impact statement

By Chandra Johnson

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Taos County's concern over Cannon Air Force Base's proposed low-altitude training flights has reached the ears of the state Legislature.

Rep. Roberto "Bobby" Gonzales has introduced a joint memorial requiring the U.S. Air Force to produce a full environmental impact statement to Cannon and the Legislature.

Gonzales, who introduced the bill after hearing an outcry from his constituents, said that he's hoping the bill will give Taos County and more specifically Taos' Peaceful Skies Coalition, the answers it wants.

"If the findings of the memorial are what we're looking for, it could lead to legislation," Gonzales said. "The process brings a high level of awareness and within that, these people are asking for something, and we feel very uncomfortable that these flights will happen. We understand the need for the training and the respect for the military, but why does it have to be in this area?"

In a 2010 public notice published in *The Taos News* Cannon said it would perform an environmental assessment of the Northern New Mexico/ southern Colorado area to determine its viability as a training area for tilt-rotor Osprey and Hercules aircraft.

The majority of the training flights would take place after dusk with 95 percent taking place Monday through Friday, the website reads. Aircraft would fly as low as 200 feet above ground level. But not over towns and congested areas, the air force stresses.

The notice states that pilots must avoid towns, wilderness, noise-sensitive and other specific areas. The plan is to conduct about three LATN trainings each day or nearly 700 flights a year, according to the air force's website.

Until the impact statement is complete, Gonzales is hoping the findings will spell "Not in Taos' backyard." "All of the concerns are very valid. We don't even know what effect it has on wildlife. That's why it helps to have a discovery process," Gonzales said. "I feel it's important. When you have that many individuals concerned, I feel people are owed due process."

And if the impact statement finds no adverse environmental disturbance? "If that's what they find out, we have to deal with the facts," Gonzales said. "But having facts is better than no facts."