

Cannon training slated for legislative hearing Nov. 23

By Chandra Johnson

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Cannon Air Force Base will be giving a presentation to the Military and Veterans Affairs Interim Committee next week (Nov. 23) regarding the progress of its proposed low-altitude flight training project.

The briefing itself will be closed to public comment, but legislative staffers said written comments can be submitted ahead of time to the committee or to staffers at the meeting, which is slated for 9 a.m. at the capitol building in Santa Fe.

State Sen. Carlos Cisneros (D-Questa) sits on the committee as an advisory member and said Tuesday (Nov. 15) that it was true that the committee could do nothing to stop or delay the proposed trainings, as the base is under the purview of the federal government.

“Clearly, they’re not listening to the community and I don’t know that they’d even listen to the Legislature, honestly, because that’s just the way the federal government functions,” Cisneros said. “A 50-mile radius in any direction is too close for comfort. People come here for the aesthetic of the land — the last thing we need is for the military to hold low-flying maneuvers in the area.”

In September, Cannon released its draft environmental assessment, which quantified the environmental and quality-of-life impacts the trainings could have on the areas of Northern New Mexico and southern Colorado that fall within the proposed training area.

The official finding of the draft was one of “no significant impact,” and the study asserted that such concerns as potential pollution, vibration and noise pollution were all within acceptable standards laid down by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The briefing will also fulfill the demands of House Memorial 70, which requested that the “appropriate interim committee study the impact of the proposed lowaltitude tactical navigation training flights in Northern New Mexico and how to address those impacts.”

The measure is meant to send a message, sponsor Rep. Roberto “Bobby” Gonzales (D-Taos) said.

“They have to understand the different concerns being brought by the individuals of Northern New Mexico and getting this issue the right attention it needs,” Gonzales said. “It’s better to have a voice than not. It will also send a message to our congressional delegation.”

Cannon officials were unavailable for comment, but legislative committee staffer Pam Stokes told *The Taos News*

the presentation will include a summary of public comment from Cannon's numerous forums all over New Mexico.

But Peaceful Skies Coalition coordinator Carol Miller decried the proviso of written comments only for the briefing.

"This will be the first legislative committee I have ever attended in 30 years which did not provide time for the public to participate," Miller said. "Do we still live in a democracy where civilians oversee the military as required by the U.S. Constitution? Or does Congress and now the New Mexico Legislature take their orders from the military?"