Recently, I visited Fort Carson in Colorado Springs. I met with Major General Mark Graham, the commanding general at the post, and his staff.
My objective was to review the training area needs for units of the U.S. Army assigned to Fort Carson as well as the Army Reserve and National Guard units that also conduct training there.

I reviewed the Army's request not only as a member of Congress serving on the House Armed Services Committee but through the eyes of a combat veteran. The Army's interest in expanding training at the Piñon Canyon Maneuver Site (PCMS) in southeastern Colorado derives from a need for larger land areas in which to train the newly formed Brigade Combat Teams (BCT) and associated units for contemporary warfare and the threats they anticipate encountering in the future. The BCTs are required to control more territory with fewer Soldiers.
In order to accurately simulate anticipated, actual, combat conditions with the equipment required, the BCTs must train over larger areas of land, thus the need for the expansion of training at PCMS.

The Army essentially does two things: it trains to go to war and goes to war. The Army must train to meet current and anticipated threats to the nation, and it must train as it expects to fight. Unit proficiency and individual readiness save the lives of American soldiers in combat.
We cannot send units and individual soldiers into battle who will be performing task for the first time.

No doubt, it is my understanding that the Army did a miserable job, initially, in working with the ranchers in the affected areas. That misstep has politically solidified into such a hostile environment that it no longer matters what the Army says or does the answer is always "not one more acre."

However, it needs to be noted that since getting off on the wrong foot the Army has worked hard to resolve the objections of the local ranchers. Unfortunately, every compromise and accommodation the Army has made since then has been met with unremitting hostility, accusations of bad faith, and an endless repetition that the Army had failed to justify its requirements.

The impacted local community said it wanted eminent domain and condemnation taken off the table. The Army has accommodated this and is dealing only with willing property owners.

When the Army asked to buy, at fair market value, resources to train Soldiers to fight and win the nation's wars, the local community said it wanted economic development. The U.S. Army has proposed $140 million of military construction and $9 million of annual local payroll and stimulus.

The local community wanted the U.S. Army to make sure that every acre requested was absolutely necessary. The Army did further analysis and determined that "Area B" (approximately 300,000 acres) was not feasible for expansion and reduced its proposal to approximately 100,000 acres in "Area A."

House Bill 1317 was recently passed by the Colorado General Assembly and signed by Governor Bill Ritter. This legislation is designed to permanently block the Army's efforts for any expansion of PCMS by directing the Colorado State Land Board not to sell any of their property holdings to the Army. Since there are sections owned by the Land Board throughout the proposed PCMS expansion area, H.B. 1317 is designed to bar the Army from expanding PCMS and ultimately to prohibit soldiers from meeting their readiness standards.

It's obvious that the Colorado General Assembly and Governor Ritter did not take into account the Army's training needs when they considered this legislation but they should have thought about the economic consequences to our state. We are in a terrible recession and I'm not sure why so many of our elected officials would want to put a stick in the eye of a $1.8 billion dollar a year employer in our state. An employer that is still hiring and gives full health care and retirement benefits.
An employer that it not asking for a bailout but to lease or purchase land from willing sellers at full market value.

My first obligation, as a member of the House Armed Services Committee, is to make sure that we have a military that is adequately equipped and trained to defend the security interest of the United States. If Colorado is unwilling to give the Army the training areas that it needs to achieve its readiness standards, and if there are cost effective alternatives offered by other states less hostile to the military, then I will have no choice but to support the Army's request to

leave our state.